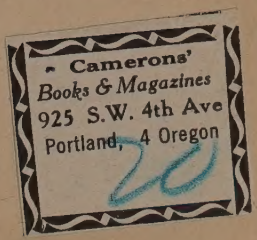
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THE PROWLER

BOOKS BY HUGH WILEY

JADE, *and other stories*
THE PROWLER
THE WILDCAT
LADY LUCK
LILY

THE PROWLER

HUGH WILEY

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TO
WESTBROOK LAW

THE PROWLER

CHAPTER I

"Prowlin' along on de primrose road,
I'se a one-hoss sinner wid a two-hoss load."

I

THE Wildcat and Demmy worked in a sawmill in the California hills for two months without drawing down any of their wages. To the Wildcat his accumulated wealth became an unreal phantom of reward. "My money I craves to handle," he protested to the diminutive Demmy who had advised against uprooting their sapling Luck Tree. "I gets me mo' action wid a single silveh dollah in my pocket dan whut you kin git wid a million golden dreams in yo head."

"You is same as got de money, I tells you! De timekeeper man is keepin' it fo' you."

"Leave him keep de time. Dat's his bizness. My same-as money is my bizness. Naw, suh, Demmy, I aims to quit dis job Sat'day evenin' an' git my same-as money in cash an' prowl down to San Framcisco wid my mascot goat."

"Aims to prowl, does you? Leave me tell you—when you pulls de trigger on whut you aims at, all you hits is heavy travellin' on de Misery Road. Ain't no place I knows of whah a nigger butterfly gits free

board 'ceptin' in de stone house wid crowbar fly screens in de windows. Lots of folks whut aims like you do never hits nothin' much 'ceptin' rocks wid a hammer afteh de ol' judge explains how much 'rithmetic makes sixty days. One nigger an' one ruckus an' one policeman—dat adds up sixty days 'cordin' to de ol' judge. Mebbe de judge kain't add right but he sings de chorus to yo' song of lamentations an' he gits de last word when you reasons together. Den it's sunshine through de crowbars an' de fresh air all outside."

"Yo' eyesight is sour. You thinks Joy River is got vinegar waves wid a quicksand bottom. Don't crave me no ruckus. Craves to see me lots of human folks whut dresses up in sto' clothes an' prances roun' on Sat'day night. Craves to see de leckrick lights an' hear de street cars an' de auto'beels, an' mebbe rest me in a movie show an' eat goobers to pass de time. Dat's all. 'Citement is all I craves."

"An' de day afteh dat you craves rations when yo' money has went."

"Money ain't gwine to went. Aims to 'vest whut I is 'cumulated in some steady bizness."

"Like de gin-drinkin' bizness? You is sho' steady at dat pastime when you begins."

"You is generally close behind de band yo'self when Ol' Demon Rum starts de gin parade. I'se seed you go a week widout openin' yo' mouth 'ceptin' to welcome yo' likker, an' widout closin' it 'ceptin' to keep yo' breath in so it wouldn't reach de lit end of yo' seegar an' blow you up. Dat's de reason I craves to git us started in a steady bizness whah you kin

tame down. How much money is us got comin'?"

"Somethin' oveh two hund'ed dollahs apiece come next Sat'day night."

"I quits an' draws mine fo' bizness purposes. Dat's lots of money. As yo' podner, I advise you to do de same. Us kin start some mighty fine city bizness fo' all dat money. Is you wid me o' does you stay bull-headed? Fo' de las' time I ax you, is you?"

In the metal of the Wildcat's voice Demmy's quick mental assay discovered the iron of a resolve against which the softer alloy of his own will could make no impression. "I is wid you. I remains wid yo till de jail do' clangs betwixt us."

Now in the Wildcat's mind as a reciprocal concession to his companion there formed a resolve to adhere to the proposed program of searching for a good steady business that would exclude those occupations which usually terminated in personal disaster. "Ain't gwine to be no jail do' clangin' dis time, Demmy," he declared. "When I sez I craves a bizness I means bizness. De only clangin' you hears is de clang of de cash register whut tells when de money comes in."

"Whut kind of bizness does you aim to git into?"

"Demmy, us considers. Us kain't start nuthin' fancy like a bank or a grocery sto'. De bank bizness winds up wid folks cravin' dey money back when you least expect. De grocery bizness is bad fo' yo' stummick 'cause you eats up de profits samplin' de mixed vittles. All I kin think of right easy is a barbeh shop,

wid mebbe seegars an' light fixins' fo customehs whut craves 'em."

"Dem chairs costs too much. You has to give credick too much afteh you gits fren'ly wid de boys, an' besides dat I'se too short, pussonal, to shave tall folks 'less I uses de overhand reach. Mighty apt to nick a man, workin' blind an' shavin' him by de feel of his face. Does I nick some folks, dey is likely to start me travellin' ahead of my spare razor widout no ticket 'ceptin' whut I kin punch wid my feet. Looks to me, Wilecat, like about de best steady payin' entehprise whut don't need much money to start, an' whah de cash rolls in de minnut befo' de work walks out, is de shoe-shine bizness."

"Sho' do! Only trouble is de money sprinkles in like a summeh showeh 'stid of fairly pourin' down like a fall cloudbust."

"Small profits an' big feet is my slogum. Yo' rain words 'minds me dey ain't no betteh time fo' to start a shine stand dan right now. In de summeh-time a man is mighty apt to right an' left de front ends of his shoes on de leg of his pants an' call hisself shone, but whilst de rains is a-pourin' down, de shine dimes keeps mighty restless till dey rallies roun' whah de shine gravy is bein' brushed into a lookin'-glass finish whah Lady Luck kin see to her face how noble she looks."

"Figger out how much money kin us take in, Demmy."

"You means good days o' bad?"

"Middlin' days."

"Jus' you an' me workin'—no hired hands?"

"Hired hands ain't no good 'ceptin' to eat wages. Figger us workin' f'm afteh breakfus' to befo' suppeh an' a while in de evenin'. How much kin us take in dat way?"

"Lemme see. Wait whilst I writes it wid a pencil. Heah it is. Whut time does us eat breakfus'?"

"Us eats early an' long. Don't aim to let no shine bizness mingle too close wid my rations. Up at six an' finished brekfus' by eight."

"Dat's fo' hours to noon. At noon us eats quick. Lots of folks walkin' round de street at noon."

"At noon don't rush me, Demmy. Dat's my main meal."

"Set de clock ahead an' fool yo' stummick till one o'clock—den us gits fed."

"Set it ahead does you crave to. My stummick kain't read no clock. Go on wid yo' figgers—I'se back at work an' it's one o'clock. Den whut?"

"Five hours mo'. Five an' fo' is nine. Hour fo' suppeh an' three hours in de evenin' makes twelve hours us works."

"Makes me tired to think how late I gits to sleep. Go ahead wid yo' figgers till de money comes rollin' in. 'Splain dat to me loud."

"Twelve hours double is twenty-fo', an' wid extra time say twenty-five hours. Ten shines kin easy be shone by you an' de same by me, every hour. Dat's twenty. Say us works extry hard—dat makes it thutty. At ten cents a shine, dat's three dollahs, an' de same fo' me makes six. Six dollahs a hour times

thutty hours—lemme see—six dollahs times ten hours is sixty dollahs an' times thirty hours is three times dat much. Sixty an' sixty. Hund'ed eighty—say two hund'ed on good days."

"Dey'll be extry days whut goes mo'—say I takes in two hund'ed on middlin' good days—dat's enough fo' me!"

"An' de same fo' me. Two an' two makes fo' hund'ed dollahs! Wilecat, dat's whut bizness kin do! Heah us is workin' heavy fo' dis ol' saw-mill man an' gittin' a measly five dollahs a day when all us has to do to git rich is quit an' start de shoe-shine bizness in San Framcisco. Is I got you 'suaded wid cold facts an' figgers?"

"Got me 'suaded! Demmy, how all dis talk git begun? Who got stubborn an' done all de hangin' back in de fust place?"

"Ain't I convixed you wid plain 'rithmetic jus' now an' showed you how I stands? Sho' I 'suaded you! Had to use de bigges' kind of figgers to do it. You crove to wait till Sat'day night an' heah it is only Monday. I'se gwine to git started fo' de promis' land right off. De milk an' honey an' de shoe-shine money is callin' loud to me. Don't delay me none, Wilecat, wid no gabblin' talk!"

"I ain't delayed you none. Git dat Lily goat untied f'm behind de cook house whilst I talks sudden to dat timekeeper man about de money paper fo' me an' you. Somethin' tells me Lady Luck is waitin' fo' us in San Framcisco. Feet, lead me!"

II

In San Francisco during the last few days of September the Wildcat slaked his thirst for a steady business by drinking deeply from the cup of pleasurable idleness afforded by his diminishing bank roll. When the total funds possessed by the two black captains of industry had dwindled to less than half of their original stake, Demmy sought to arouse in his companion memories of their mutual resolve which had inspired their farewells to their sawmill job. "Git up outen dat bed, Wilecat! You is slept 'leven hours!"

"Lucky numbeh—I feels like I is only had me a nap."

"An' den some! Git up! I'se seed lazy folks but de only diff'unce between you an' a dead nigger is dat you stays on top of de ground widout spoilin'. Git up an' git yo' brekfus'. Me an' de mascot goat is et."

The mention of breakfast was one of the few alarms which could arouse the sleep-craver. He ate his breakfast, consuming two hours and two dollars in the process, and then, refreshed and seeing his duty plainly enough to enable him to escape from it, he languished, until noon, in the Clover Club. This emporium of recreation for the brunette members of the idle rich who sought the companionship of their kind on Fillmore Street sheltered whoever could unlock its doors with a weekly membership fee of one dollar. Prominent among the affiliated personnel was numbered an individual whose affable manner had won the

Wildcat's friendship at a time when Demmy's unflattering opinion held that this Perdue Grandy was naught but pompous yaller nigger, mainly mouth, and given to demonstrating that the Lord had created him out of dirt by acting like it. "Stay away f'm dat Grandy," Demmy advised. "Dat nigger got a red eye, Wilecat, an' dat means trouble. Boy kain't pass de time o' day widout makin' me feel nervous about my watch. Talks too uppity to be honest."

"Talks pleasant wid me—done give me a lucky charm stone fo' a present. Stan's high wid dese Fillmo' street boys."

"Ain't stood dat way long—an' at present de way I feels, pussonal, he's topplin' to fall. Wuz I twice my size las' night when he win dat five-spot f'm me flippin' heads o' tails wid his pet dollah whut ain't got no mo' tail to it dan a bear, dey would of been trouble. Quick trouble, I means! I knock his nose aroun' to whah he could lissen through it to me playin' his funeral march on his head wid a brick. Dat's me!"

"No matteh whut he wins wid dat trick dollah, de boy sho' spends easy an' free."

"Whah at he git his money? Don't do no work fo' it. I could spend easy did cash grow like trouble."

"Who tells you he don't work? Ol' Perdue got hisself a shoe-shine stand runnin' like us gwine to start. Dat's de reason I'se been 'filiatin' wid him so free—so I kin learn all about de bizness befo' us 'vests our money. F'm whut he sez, it's de bes' bizness whut is, but it don't pay whut you figgered when you led me into it."

"You ain't led fur as yit. Whut you mean, whut I figger?"

"You sez us makes fo' hund'ed dollahs ev'y day when you leads me strayin' f'm my sawmill job."

"Fo' hund'ed a month is whut I sez. I ain't counted no money yit. Ain't gwine count none whilst yo' mouth uses up all yo' time. How much rent dat Perdue nigger pay fo' his place?"

"Ain't spoke of rent. Dat's outgoin' money."

"When de sun is high an' de sky is blue in de noontime of success—you knows de song—den's de time to think of dis outgoin' cash. Dat's worry money whut you kain't spend. Whah at dis Perdue man's place?"

"Fillmo' street. 'Bout two blocks up."

"Come 'long wid me whilst us gits shined up."

"Whut you aim to do?"

"Aims to talk wid dis ol' Perdue Grandy some. I got me a scheme whut might slick de skid road to whah yo' Lady Luck is at. Come 'long. Leave dat goat heah in de room. Lily kain't no mo' dan eat de res' of dat bed mattress whilst us is gone. Fust off, us eats de noon ration, den us confabs wid dis Perdue concernin' bizness."

When a noon ration, heavy enough to shatter an ambitious army quartermaster's dream of promotion had been stored away, the pair, groaning comfortably and making wig-wag gestures with the outboard ends of two dusty cigars sagging from flaccid lips, began to strut a prosperity drag toward Perdue Grandy's establishment on Fillmore street.

"Sho' is a busy street," Demmy observed. "Keep

yo' eyes peeled, Wilecat, fo' some vacant place whut us kin get to 'stablish into permanent."

"Hardly kin git dese eyes open, Demmy. Nigh et myself blind. Dere's ol' Perdue's stand, 'cross de street."

The pair crossed Fillmore street and greeted the proprietor of the two-chair shine parlor. "How is you, Perdue?"

"Dumb wid grief, missin' you boys up to dis minnit."

"How dey stackin'?"

"Nickel a foot—same price right o' left. How is you?"

"Toleratin' my prosperity. Is dey two shines left in de bull-blood box?"

"An' den some. Whut dem shoes cost you, Wilecat?"

"Sto' man give me coffin rates—five dollahs a foot. Fooled him some. Mah feet wuz only asleep."

"Step up an' set. Is dey asleep now, I wakes 'em wid a sizzle brush an' a hot rag. Hit 'em wid gravy an' burn 'em wid a rag, when I is finished you has reason to brag."

"Doggone, Perdue! Neveh knowed you could poetize."

"Comes natural to me, same as breathin' wind in an' out. Poetizin's de least of my histronics."

"Sho' am!" The word sounded all right to the Wildcat but it was so far back in the dark den of his ears that he couldn't quite see what kind of an animal it was. Well, out of consideration for ol' Perdue,

the least he could do was to drag the varmint word out by the neck and admire it. "Sho' am! Is you 'quipped wid many of dem histronics?"

"Is I! Jus' to begin, I mentions poetizin' ad lib, silveh cornet, mind-readin', some piano, heel an' toe, easy bass, fake tenor, gag-feeder two seasons wid Ozan's minstrels, an' fairly fast at fire-eatin' an' open stage predestigatin'."

"Lawd mingle below!" The Wildcat's feet flopped off their iron supports and dangled as loosely as his lower jaw. When speech returned: "You bust de unbroke record! Whut dat devestigatin' bizness like?"

"Sleight-o'-hand wid disappearin' cards an' watches an' money."

"Don't de otheh players o' de police eveh pester you?"

"Whut you mean?" A challenge in the Perdue tone suggested an unfortunate shadow of accuracy in the Wildcat's question.

"Whut I means is I don't mean nothin'!" The pacifist looked sidewise at Demmy, who was submerged in the pugilistic advertising-matter appearing in the sport section of an evening paper. "I don't mean nuthin', Perdue. Whah at is you done all dis high-tone devestigatin'?"

"On de stage. I puts in fifteen years wid road shows."

"You don't tell! Mus' be noble—travellin' all de time an' a-prancin' 'long through de land amusin' folks wid all dem things you said."

"Sho' is. Mostly I manages durin' de las' ten years. Had my own road show up to las' year."

"How come you quit?"

"Trouble wid de star. Crove mo' money an' wid dat I gits independent an' closes de show."

The statement sketched the facts. The star which had accomplished Perdue Grandy's independence was a nickel-plated insignia of authority worn on the narrow chest of a small-town sheriff serving a populace whose appreciation of the drama, reduced to terms of cash, was not sufficient to cover hotel bills, hall rent and justice-court fines for the petty crimes which engaged the idle hours of Perdue Grandy's troupers.

"Aims to start me a gran' aggregation dis fall, soon as I gits de talent organized." The smell of grease paint mingled in the Perdue nostrils with the odor of bull-blood shoe paste. "Vood'ville road show."

Demmy and the Wildcat shared the same quick thought. The latter, more open in his engagement with Lady Luck, was the first to speak. "Perdue, when you starts yo' vood'ville show, whut does you aim to do wid dis shoe-shine bizness?"

"Sell out dis gol' mine any minnit."

"How much you git fo' it?"

The proprietor of the gold mine made a quick mental estimate based on the Wildcat's forgotten boast of affluence and came within ten dollars of the easy mark. "Two hund'ed dollars. My lease greedment got a year to run afteh de fust of Janwary an' dat's three months yit. Day after tommor' is Octobeh fust."

"Whut rent does you pay?" Demmy, silent up to that moment, asked a practical question.

"Lil hund'ed dollahs ev'y quarteh. Ev'y three months. Three months sho' a long time."

"Whut does you take in?"

"Some days is big an' some is even bigger. Sundays is de bes' days, 'ceptin' Sat'days. Sometimes Sat'days would fairly keep my feet off de groun' less I wuz weighted down heavy wid de money I'se took in. Yaas, suh!"

The sawed-off bloodhound stuck to the trail. "How much is you gin'ally weighted down wid on reg'lar days?" Perdue Grandy, evading the question, looked up and down the street in search of customers whose arrival might tend to verify the gold-mine adjective used in his prospectus. Seeing none, he rested his vision upon a fleeced cloud in the southern sky, no larger than a man's handy inspiration, and fixed upon the weather as his alternative theme. "Take weatheh, fo' instance. Beginnin' de fust of Octobeh, de rainy season sets in, an' no matteh whut piles of money I is took in up to date, I tells you de minnit de rain begins, dey ain't no tellin' what wealth it leads to. Figgeh it out fo' yo'selfs. Dey is a million folks in an' aroun' dis town, an' how many shoe-shine places is you seed? Answeh me dat." The questioner paused for his own reply.

"I ain't seed but five." The Wildcat was helping all he could.

"I'se seed five, an' dat makes ten." Demmy made haste to chip in with the pertinent data. "Suppose

dey's a hund'ed folks like me an' de Wilecat an' dey's all lookin' at once. Dat's a hund'ed mollified by ten. Dat makes a thousan' shoe-shine stan's altogetheh. Go ahead an' figger f'm dat, Perdue."

The promoter leaped ahead from the flying start provided by the diminutive mathematician. "You comes widin one of de exack figger," he conceded. "Leave it go at a even thousan' an' figger either way an' whah does you come out? You comes out rich, I tells you! Only half de stan's is runnin' 'count of who owns 'em bein' on holidays o' else takin' all dat money to de bank, an' dey is shut down half de time durin' de night, so you kin easy say divide up dem million folks' shine money amongst mebbe two hund'ed an' fifty steady-runnin' places like this. If dem folks only spends ten cents apiece, dat's a hund'ed thousand dollars ev'y day an' dat much divode even an' exack is—lemme see, two hund'ed fifty into a million is fo' hund'ed dollahs. Whut I tells you, Wilecat? Dat's real money! Whut I tells you?"

"You tells me de same as dis Demmy nigger heah. Sho' is big money, Perdue."

Perdue Grandy beamed his triumph, but in the pause the bloodhound circled back to the old trail. "On middlin' good days, Perdue, whut does you take in to pay de rent with an' such?"

"Well, figger it de otheh way if you craves to!" Impatience marked the calculator's tone, but he smothered his real sentiments in a new weave of arithmetic. "Take dem five shoe-shine stan's you is seed,

Demmy, an' de five whut de Wilecat is seed. Dat makes ten. Suppose only one man outen every ten gits dey shoes shone. Dat's a hund'ed thousan'. At ten cents apiece, dat's ten thousan' dollahs. Divide dat amongst yo' ten stan's an' whah at is you? Dat's a thousan' dollahs fo' each an' ev'y one—five hund'ed fo' you an' de same fo' dis yere Wilecat afteh it is divode even. Dat's all!"

"Hot dam!" The Wildcat felt his luck. "Perdue, you means dat much ev'y single day?"

Too much vision, and the black Babbitt realized it in time to amend his dream. "I means dat ev'y month."

The glitter seemed to tarnish on the bait. "Summeh months, dat is—when dey's lots of folks out of town. Soon as de rainy weatheh begins day afteh tommor', you kin count on twice dat much, an' is dey lots of mud, plenty of mud, you ought to git prepared to take de bank anyhow a thousan' dollars an' mebbe mo'."

"How offen does us take dat thousan' dollahs to de bank man?"

"Ev'y week, I figgers, wid lots of mud."

"I sez you does."

"Whut dat?" Perdue Grandy turned quickly toward the source of the muttered criticism.

"Nuthin'," Demmy returned, and then, explaining nuthin': "I was jus' whisperin' oveh yo' figgers."

"Ain't dey all correck?" Here was a challenge.

"Mainly dey is—all 'ceptin' de mud. Neveh kin

count on mud. I'se seed mud whut looks thin like skin on de road. Git into it—dat's all I sez. Come clean up to my neck."

"Ain't surprisin'. You is built so close to de ground, you kin use corn plasters fo' a headache. Did you have bunions an' brain feveh at de same time, dey'd feel like de stummick misery. Whut about de deep mud?"

"Whut I'se tryin' to say is dey ain't nevah no deep mud in San Framcisco."

"I'se referrin' at shoe-shine mud. Don't have to be deep mud. Nobody but you is brought up de subject of deep mud. Keep yo' deep mud I sez—I thrives along noble on de plain splatterin' mud. Spreadin' kind, I means—not de oozin' kind. Dese San Framcisco folks spends easy—dey don't have to bog down to dey belly-band like a mule befo' dey spends ten cents on de currycomb. Naw, suh! De mud subject I claims to know. Local mud season begins a day after to-morr' an' right den dis place gits crowded wid folks whut craves to git dey shoes shone."

Demmy's silence, his steady stare at persons unknown, and his eyes published his acknowledgment of defeat. Perdue Grandy knew that the Wildcat was won over and now, as a poised hawk sweeps earthward at the moment of its kill, he descended upon his hypnotized victims with talons wide-stretched for the trophies of conquest. "Pay me de two hund'ed dollahs now an' you gits dis 'stablished bizness an'

a receet papeh an' de full financial obligations whut goes wid de place. Dat's me!"

The Wildcat had his money out but Demmy hung back a moment, delaying his personal surrender with one final question: "Perdue, does you mean de comin'-in o' de goin'-out financial allegations?"

"I means de incomin' kind what some of de Cloveh Club boys runs on de books wid me. Dat Holloway Isby pays by de month an' de Mennonay boy whut drives fo' some Jackson street white folks runs his leatheh leggin's shine bill heah an' I gives credick to some white gem'mun—Mist' Scott Williams an' Mist' Cressey Hardin whut settles big wid intrus' now an' den an' some mo' steady customers. Sho' adds up big."

The vender had inscribed a document as he talked. He handed the scribbled paper and a lead pencil to the Wildcat. "Sign yo' name right dah an' pay me de two hund'ed. Dat's dat."

"Ain't nevah learned readin', Perdue." The Wildcat passed the legal instrument to his pardner. "Read me whut dat writement sez, Demmy. Read loud so I kin git it understood plain in my head."

Demmy read aloud: "De fust pusson of de fust part, to wit Perdue Granby, heahby solemnly sweahs dat he acknowledges, whereas, Vitus Marsden de second pusson hereinbefo' stated owes him two hund'ed dollahs fo' good-will an' financial obligations, be it resolved dat de same is paid in cash dis twenty-ninth day of September at de Cyclone Shine Parlor and

whereas furthermo' we hitherto witness his affixed hand an' seal."

"Soun's reg'lar to me," the Wildcat admitted. "Whut about dat hand an' seal bizness, Perdue? I kain't write."

"Dat ain't nuthin' but a legal normality whut dese soopreem courts an' such uses in case lawsuit is brought by yo' next of kin when dey claims yo' mo'tal remains. Make yo' cross-mark an' its jus' de same. Write yo' cross-mark heah—wait till I holds it stidy on de arm of de chair. Dah you is . . . an' dat's dat. Now yo' podneh signs it fo' his half-intrus' . . . an' now I takes dis writement papeh in case of reference, an' de cash consideration. Dat's right . . . hund'ed ninety, ninety-five, two hund'ed, Exackly key-reck! One mo' thing—if you boys eveh sells out an' craves to travel in de show bizness wid my all-star histronics company, hunt me up whah-at I'se performin' an' you is both hired on at high sal'ry. You acts to me like you both is got de hidden talent whut makes actors famous."

CHAPTER II

FOR the first half-hour after Perdue Grandy had surrendered possession of the Cyclone Shine Parlor, the new proprietors busied themselves with an inventory of their holdings and then, on the principle that live bait helps fill the larder, the Wildcat sat down in one of the two throne chairs and concealed his features from the passing throng behind a newspaper which he could not read. "Show yo'self busy," he suggested to Demmy. Their business career was young and the hour for peremptory command was not yet come. "Show busy an' shine dese shoes I got on, an' den I shines yours an' folks stops an' steps in."

Demmy shined the Wildcat's shoes and then the dummy customer shined his pardner's shoes, and it was the second hour of the afternoon of the first business day.

Demmy shined the Wildcat's shoes again, grumbling this time, but impotent in the clutch of superior authority. "Go on an' shine dem shoes, Demmy, whilst I reads into dis papeh."

The second in command began work with a sullen languor that was poor advertising for the Cyclone establishment. "You kain't read no papeh bottom

side up," he complained, wrapping his real sentiments in a neutral covering of mere words.

"Who is a-readin' in dis papeh, me o' you? Read yo' own papeh up an' down, sideways, antigodlin' o' roun' an' roun' does you crave to. All I'se readin' is a view of a man loopin' de loop in a flyin'-machine, an' I turns him bottom side up to make it mo' dangerous an' excitin' so I don't fall to sleep. Does he fall de way I reads him, he falls up an' gits to be a angel widout havin' to change his clothes."

"Ain't nuthin' but de soul goes on high." Lacking other weapons, Demmy persisted in fencing with the exasperating blade of superior knowledge. "All humans 'rives nekked at de pearly gates when Gabr'el blows de bugle on Judgment Day."

"Like dem cold mawnin' meals in de A.E.F. Fo'get dat perdicktin' an' hit dat lef' shoe a lick. I'se gwine to leave you in soopreem command of dis place whilst I brings dat mascot goat to whah us kin reg'late her conduck. Lily been sassy eveh since she et all dat sawdust up at de sawmill. Take in all de money you kin whilst I'se gone. All I got lef' is six dollahs."

"Dat's two mo' dan whut I is. Ol' Perdue strained me down to less dan five. Neveh seed such a deprivin' man."

"Nemmine 'bout bein' deprived financial. Us rolls high when de rush begins. Whilst I'se gone, see kin you seleck de bes' kind of a auto'beel fo' us to buy when de fall rains covehs de land wid mud an' money like ol' Perdue figgered."

Here was the faith that closed the Wildcat's ears to the "no" of his Lady Luck, and dim rose-tinted lenses for his eyes, against the thin smile of her scorn. Borrowing something of reliance from this creed of courage, Demmy greeted his first customer, during, his pardner's absence, with a professional confidence born of a new belief in his personal luck. Expensive tan shoes, high yeller and brightly new. The newspaper. Whiskbroom. Parked laces. Dust brush. Soap suds. Drying-cloth. "Hit 'em wid brown gravy, an' baste de toe wid a second helpin'."

Striving to please, Demmy worked fast, following through the successive steps of the shine process with close attention to details. His patron, reading the newspaper right side up, settled down for a five-minute rest after the usual preliminary inspection of his own footwear. Preoccupied with a choice paragraph covering a social event in Hollywood, he failed to note a sudden cessation of Demmy's labors until his consciousness was jerked back to Fillmore street from the luxuriant pasturage wherein it had grazed on the gratifying green shoots of scandal.

"Lawd redeem sinners! Dat's a mistake!" Demmy stood back and faced his handiwork with a countenance plastered thickly with the gray lotion which results from mixing fear with surprise. "Done reached fo' the brown gravy an' got de black!"

A three-inch stripe of black liquid lay across the fair yellow surface of the victim's left shoe and a four-inch black frown was on his face. Seeing the frown, Demmy sniffed long and elaborately with his

nose close to the neck of the open black bottle, seeking to verify with his olfactory organs the message of disaster conveyed by his vision. "I roach fo' de brown bottle but it wuz moved," he explained. "Wukin' so fas' dat way I'se likely——"

"Work fast and wipe that black junk off before I——"

"Ya-as suh!" Some things are pleasant not to hear and Demmy interrupted his customer's promise with a furious effort at a salvage problem like unto rendering a leopard inconspicuous in a family of polar bears.

Failing in his chemistry, he fell back on cash, compromising for the damage with three silver dollars and twenty minutes of hard work during which he gave the surface of the tan shoes three coats of black polish and enough mental profanity to keep a mule cheerful through an old-fashioned winter.

Now it was the third hour of the afternoon of the first day's business.

At five minutes after three, canvassing Fillmore street, a fast worker with a mysterious black box stopped at the Cyclone Shine Parlor and acted mighty pleasant. Except for a wound-salting reminder of the continued fine weather that was being inflicted upon mud-craving humans, Demmy realized that here was a white man he could get along real good with. The conversation veered from weather to business, thence to business aids, trade lures and the shoe-shining industry synchronized to jazz music, with incidental

labor lightened by the thought of having to see mamma most every night or not at all.

The phonograph was in plain view now, and a dollar down deemed almost an insult to its manifest worth. "Let me put on a record until you can hear how perfectly it reproduces every shade of the human voice."

"Mighty pleasant man," Demmy reflected. "Sho' is real fren'ly."

The prevailing color note of the human voice turned out to be the promissory variety. "A dollar now and a dollar a week for thirty weeks—you'll never notice it, and in addition you get twelve records absolutely free."

"Which twelve does I git?"

"Your own selection—or you can take this machine and these records if you prefer."

"I puf-fers dis machine. Heah's de dollah."

"All right, just sign the firm name and your name here on this lower line . . . and there you are."

Now that the pleasant man had left, Demmy busied himself with the new labor-lightener, working at it steadily until the Wildcat returned at four o'clock, leading the mascot goat. Salutations interpolated the missing banana song and then when it was definitely stated by parties unknown that none of the bananas in question were in their possession on that date: "Whah you git dat groan box?"

"Ain't no groan box. Sings real plain."

"I means, whah you git it?"

"'Stallment man left it. Mighty pleasant man."

"Dey always is. It's de collectors whut has de sour dispositions. Whut it cost?"

"Thutty dollahs—dollah down an' usual."

"I seed one jus' like it in de secon'-han' sto' down de street fo' half dat."

"Look again. Dis is got twelve free records an', besides dat, us only puts up a dollah down."

"Keep sowin' yo' money reckless—dat's all I sez. Bimeby you git so fur behind, you is alone 'ceptin' fo' bill-collectors. How much you got lef'?"

The obligation imposed by their mutual interests led Demmy into a concise statement of his financial status. "Nuthin'."

"Whah at is dem three otheh dollahs you had?"

Here again was a divided liability that might be a hard one to get approved and passed by the auditing department. "Spilt dat black polish on a tan shoe an' had to settle fo' cash. Doggone, Wilecat,—don't ask me no mo' questions!"

"Ain't gwine ax you no mo' questions, Demmy. All I'se aimin' to do is tell you somethin'." The Wildcat's voice was less aggressive now, and tempered with a gentle forbearance which had been absent during the hours when golden visions had mantled his shoulders with the purple gossamer of temporal power. "Gwine to tell you some news an' ax yo' advice."

Demmy made a quick estimate of the quality of the news. "How bad is it?"

"Ain't as bad as all dat . . . put a soothin' blues

on dat groan box, o' else some good revival piece . . . you knows when I leaves you to git dis mascot Lily, I has me six dollahs. Ain't got it now. I meets ol' Perdue at de Cloveh Club an' he gives me a howdy-do to five o' six new niggers I ain't met befo' an' sets up de see-gars. I tells de boys to join me in de sass-parilla ruckuss an' dat takes a even dollah. Den ol' Perdue took my dollah an' done some histronics wid it to 'muse us all. Den he tells me to call it heads o' tails fo' five dollahs. I spoke befo' I figgered an' tol' him tails—an' she come heads. Dat's all—'ceptin' den I thought whut you tol' me 'bout his double-headed trick dollah an' de rent on dat room due to-morr'."

When the Wildcat had spoken his confession, Demmy reached over and shut off the phonograph. He was silent thereafter for a retrospective minute and then, singing softly, he voiced his reply with a quotation from the Koran:

> "When de sun is high an' de sky is blue,
> Neveh trade yo' money fo' an I.O.U.
>
> Neveh bet nothin' wid a gam'lin man:
> If he kain't win, no-body can.

"Naw, suh, Wilecat—act reckless wid yo' money jus' so often an bimeby you wears out de less part an' comes to de wreck."

"Don't tell me—I knows. Ain't but one main thing right now whut I don't know, an' dat's whah at us gits suppeh money."

"Dey still spells work wid a double-you—dey's boun' to be shine-cravers come dis way mighty soon, den double you-self up an' drag a rag. Dat's a dime."

"Mouth money kain't be spent—you sowed three dollahs on yo' fust shine 'stid of reapin' a dime an——"

"'Ten-shun! Man a-comin'! Black shoes!" Demmy's interruption heralded a prospect who hatched into a customer in the sunlight of two smiles. "Start poetizin' Wilecat!" Demmy whispered. "Time wid yo' feet whilst I talks back!"

"Climb to de chair, mistuh, set yo'self down,
Bes' shine heah whut you gits in de town.

Tuck in dem laces, Demmy, brush off de dust,
Ramble, boy, ramble, else I gits done fust.

Soapsuds, haw, an' soapsuds, gee,
Slow down, Wilecat, speedy fo' me.

Drag wid de rag, Demmy, drag him dry,
Kain't rule you off fo' beginnin' to try.

Pass me de gravy whut is midnight-black,
I'se a ten-mile stepper on a one-mile track!

Heah you is, Demmy, wid de dobber loose,
Yo' engine is a-waitin'—hurry up, caboose.

Burn 'em wid de rag till dey starts to shine,
Double time, Demmy—I is finished wid mine.

Reach oveh, Wilecat, han' me de paste,
Whilst I is busy, you has time to waste.

Rub 'em in de back wid de bristle brush,
Smooth 'em in a hurry 'cause de Cap'n sez rush.

Clean rag now, an' steady yo' hand,
Till dey shines like de sun in de promis' land.

Koruss: F'm away down South in de land of cotton,
Us is travelled up to Fillmo' street.

De sun shines bright on yo' ol' Kaintucky home
But us shines you brighter on de feet!"

"Dat's all, suh—you is shone." The Wildcat bowed and removed one of the foot rests to afford the customer clearance for his descent from the throne, glancing thereafter at the white man's face to approximate the degree of appreciation which might reward the casual entertainment furnished with the shine, but instead of a kindly word of approval the stranger asked a question: "Where's the other boy that runs this place?"

The Wildcat set the foot rest back into its socket. "Cap'n suh, you means dis Perdue Grandy whut used to run it?"

"Whateveh his name is."

"Us bought him out—'quipment, good-will, financial allegations an' eve'ythin'."

"How were the allegations?"

"Prime, suh, major, an' widout blemish."

"Well, mark this shine down on yo' books. I had a charge account with Perdue or whateveh his name is." The stranger raised his voice and spoke fast in the hard accents of command. "Mark it down quick befo' you forget it! What you standin' still fo'?"

"Cunnel, yessuh! Whah's dat pencil, Demmy? Git a piece of papeh quick like de gin'ral sez. Start a-markin' down when I tells you! Keep ev'ybody waitin'!"

One of the trio was not kept waiting. By the time paper and pencil were found, the stranger was lost in the late afternoon traffic half a block up the street. "Or mebbe down de street," Demmy amended. "I ain't seed which way he went wid you a-foamin' at de mouth 'bout dis papeh an' pencil. Heah you is, Wilecat—whut does you crave to have me mark down? Whut's de man's name?"

"Ain't said his name. Write down: 'One Southe'n man, ten cents.' Prolly f'm Miss'sippi, Demmy."

"Sounded some Louis'ana to me."

"Talks too hard fo' dat fur south. When de words pop like a ol' bull whip you is safe in sayin' Vicksburg. Is you got de ten cents marked down?"

"I writ ten dollahs—makes me feel mo' prosp'rus. Whut's a ol' papeh anyway?"

"Sho' is. Mark anotheh ten dollahs down fo' me. It cheers me up some. In de brain, dat is. Kain't agitate my pussonal stummick wid no lead pencil money. Whut dat you writin' now?"

"I writ de words pork chops."

"You writ two words."

"Dey's two pork chops—an' dat ain't half plenty, de way I feels."

"Write me down de word ham, an' den write down two dozen eggs an' ham gravy to sop a loaf of bread in an' to dribble oveh some yams, an' a big dish o' hominy an' some side meat wid greens an' den—doggone, Demmy! Tear up dat papeh befo' I drowns myself waterin' at de mouth! Kain't even see fish money fo' suppeh, let alone a reg'lar meal. . . . Lady Luck, Whah at is you?"

"Wilecat, us stan's high 'roun' heah. Easy git credick fo' suppeh at de lunch stan' nex' do' to de Clover Club."

"Stan's high wid eve'ybody 'ceptin' de folks you craves to git credick from. Big money an' big credick is twins. Go bust an' de only place you kin git anythin' charged is de police station whah dey charges you wid vagrumcy."

"Dat pleasant white man charged me dis foamograph dis afternoon."

"Dat's diff'unt. Dat's 'stallments. Anybody kin git 'stallments on anythin' 'ceptin' room an' board. Try payin' ten cents a week on a two-dollah meal of vittles an' see how fur you travels on de credick hoss. Naw, suh, Demmy, when you rides de credick hoss you gits a gran' ride, goin', but you neveh realizes how fur you is went till you starts walkin' back, barefoot, on de cold cash road.

Fillmore street was shadowed now with evening's

pledge of night. The Wildcat looked suddenly at the phonograph that Demmy had bought. "Demmy, is I got a intrus' in dat foamograph?"

Thinking of the serious things of life, Demmy was reminded of the impending installments on the music machine. "Sho' yo' is, Wilecat. You is got a full half-intrus'. Us is podners in dis place an' de pleasant man tol' me dat foamograph music wuz part of de new style shoe-shine bizness."

"Demmy, some day I'se gwine to make you a present. Gwine give you a reg'lar foamograph wid a gold handle an' a high stand wid de bigges' hawn you eveh seed. When you sees de foamograph I'se gwine to present you wid, you sees a foamograph whut kin play an' sing ennything, an' repeat! Whut I means!"

"Den whut?"

"Nuthin'—'ceptin' right now I wants you to donate yo' half-intrus' in dis measly li'l ol' groan box to me."

"Den whut?"

"Don't 'whut' me so steady—mind whut de Book sez 'bout 'Ye of li'l faith.' "

"All you 'minds me of whut de Book sez is: 'Ax an' ye shall receive.' I donates you my half-intrus' —pervidin' you he'ps me wid de secon' 'stallment nex' week."

"Us he'ps you—me an' Lady Luck." The Wildcat got up and put the phonograph under his arm. "I gits back befo' half a hour an' when I comes I has you a s'prise."

"Whah you gwine?"

"Dat's my bizness. Yo' bizness is shinin' shoes,

if any, whilst I'se gone, an' a-seein' dat Lily don't eat up mo' dan half dem shine rags. Git dat goat outen dat 'quipment!"

Demmy hazed the mascot away from her new menu and by the time she had been anchored to a gas pipe which ran along the inside wall of the establishment the Wildcat was half a block up Fillmore street on his way toward a second-hand store. He paused at a bakery window long enough to permit his vision to caress a row of apple pies. When fact had triumphed over imagination he resumed his march, continuing until a display in a restaurant window again arrested him, and here the victory of mind over matter was not accomplished until General Reality's shock troops had engaged the phantom enemy whose bayonets threatened the vitals of the weakened Will Morale. "Hot dam! Money, I'se a-comin' to git you! When you is got I trades you fo' dat two-foot bull steak. Meat, I means! Come 'long, foamograph, till you learns to play de mess call. I likes music wid my meals but when I kain't have both I gits along widout de music. Mebbe jazz kin agitate de human stummick, tem'rary, but fo' steady bulgin' give me rations."

At the second-hand store the Wildcat asked one question. Thereafter, for slightly less than a lifetime, according to the chronometry of his stomach, he listened to a statement of rotten business conditions and to repeated references to the recent acute slump in phonograph sales. "The most such a phonograph is worth is four dollars."

"Cost thutty. Ought to fetch ten."

"Five dollars in gold is the last cent I could give."

"Gimme de money!" The clink of a gold piece had ended the deal. The Wildcat clutched the little gold coin in his fist and started back to the Cyclone establishment where Demmy awaited him. This time, passing the restaurant window, he paused for but a moment. "Bull steak, us is comin' back! Breathe heavy whilst you kin. When us gits back, you gwine to git smothered wid onions an' drowned in gravy! Thutty-two teeth workin' fo' one stummick—an' dat's de odds agin' you. I craves rain an' mud but de weather you gits is rare an' warmer. Prophesizes me!"

The weather prophet paused in his predictions long enough to drag the backs of both hands across the moist corners of his mouth, and then, with arms swinging, he resumed his march to the cadence of a song inspired by the favor of the siren Lady Luck.

"I don't bother work, work don't bother me,
I'se fo' times as happy as a bumblebee;
I eats when I kin git it; sleeps mos' all de time,
I don't give a doggone if de sun don't neveh shine.
I kin ride de grub train, down de bill-of-fare,
I kin ride de ration wagon enny-where.
Dat's de reason I'se happy as a bee—
'Cause I don't bother work when work don't bother me."

The lift of the careless wave of song carried him to within a hundred feet of his port of call. "Come 'long, Demmy—come runnin!" he hailed, entering the

Cyclone harbor where his pardner swung on the grating anchor chains of duty. "Leave dat goat run de bizness whilst us eats."

Demmy stepped down from his throne and pulled his cap down over his eyes. "Wilecat, I took in twenty cents f'm two cash customehs whilst you wuz gone. Mebbe somebody betteh stay heah an' mind de trade."

"Leave 'em shine dey feet on Lily. Come 'long, I tells you. Said I'd bring you a s'prise—us is got money!"

The Wildcat reached into his pocket to the accompaniment of Demmy's "How much us got?" and then: "Lawd Gawd! Whah at's dat gol' piece!"

He dragged the lining of his pocket into view—and discovered a forgotten hole. "Dat's de hole! Dat's it! Same hole I lost dem dice out of. Wore out dat hole carryin' dat lucky stone ol' Perdue give me!"

"Don't 'splain nothin' to me. You claimed you'd bring me a s'prise—I might of knowed which kind."

"Thinkin' 'bout eatin' so much, how could I 'member a triflin' thing like a hole in my pocket? I'se so hungry I kain't 'member a suit o' clothes, leave alone a pocket."

"How hungry is you?" Relenting contours softened the hard lines around Demmy's mouth.

"Demmy, dis time I busts all de starvin' records whut is! Thought I was hungry in de A.E.F., but 'longside de way I feels now, I wuz fed up to de bustin'-point widout realizin' my danger."

"Wilecat, I gives you ten cents f'm de twenty I took in. Heah it is—but I be dogged kin I see whut makes you so hungry. Us et noble at noon."

"Gimme dat dime an keep a-tryin' to see till I gits back. I got a thanksgivin' date wid a loaf o' bread two blocks f'm heah an' my stummick tells me it's Chris'mus! Boy, don't delay me!"

At the first corner on his way to the rendezvous with the impatient loaf of bread, the Wildcat hesitated at the door of a soft-drink emporium. He entered, to reappear, licking his lips, four minutes later. "Sho' noble sass-prilla water. Sho' gratifyin' to de throat . . . don't crave me no vittles nohow—had me a big meal at noon . . . dat ain't so fur back . . . got to take it easy goin' back so Demmy thinks I'se eatin' dat bread. Dassn't tell him I'se scattered my substance on sass-prilla like de pardigal son, else he might welcome me by killin' de fatted Lily—o' else me. Po' li'l Demmy—wish dat damn Lady Luck knowed my ad-dress so I could buy Demmy a fine meal an' a good see-gar an' a suit o' clothes wid yaller shoes an' a brindle vest . . . I betteh git back an' talk wid dat boy—like as not, he's lonesome by dis time, settin' dere by hisself figgerin' whah at is I went."

When the Wildcat got back to the Cyclone stand, it was living up to its name and Demmy was not idle. The ten-cent Vicksburg man who popped his words like a bull whip was standing beside three of his companions, while two more of the visiting party were seated in the throne chairs. Faced by Big Business,

the Wildcat went into action with an energy that blinded him with sweat before he could slow to the cadence of the shoe-shine moan that Demmy had started while he labored alone.

Demmy conveyed the patrons' desires in a hoarse whisper: "Dey craves words an' music wid every shine, Wilecat."

"Lead out, Demmy, say whut you will,
Shuffle wid yo' feet an' I follows you still.

Kain't lead, Wilecat, plumb out o' breath,
Whilst you wuz eatin' I wuz workin' to death.

You ain't dead, Laz'rus! Rise an' shine,
Befo' I annoints you wid de turkentine."

Laz'rus hit the collar like a bogged-down mule disrobing himself from hay-wire harness—and within five minutes thereafter the Vicksburg man craved to state that "Cyclone" was right, promising, the while, to tell the cock-eyed world where it could get a ten-dollar show with a ten-cent shine. "My account with that Perdue nigger was six or eight dollars," he explained to the Wildcat when the party was leaving. "Here's a ten-spot, son, and we'll call it square, 'ceptin' I've a mind to kill you fo' makin' me so homesick."

"Cap'n, yessuh! Whateveh time you sets fo' de killin', me an' Demmy waits yo' pleasure."

Now it was the ninth hour of the evening of the first business day, and the world was good. At

twenty minutes after the hour, the two-foot bull steak in the restaurant down the street was rare and warmer, and equally divided between the weather prophet and his companion. "Whut I tells you, Demmy? Heah us is took in ten dollahs in a half-hour. Figger me how much us takes in durin' a full day at dat rate."

"Wilecat, don't pester me wid no triflin' thoughts. I'se tryin' to figger me how much vittles a full stummick kin take in an' I ain't seed de answer yit. Pass dat ketchup sauce an' see kin you figger how us kin eat a apple pie afteh us is choked to de neck on good ol' meat an' gravy. Dat's my main problem!"

The mantle of night lay upon the land, and peace encompassed about them, and presently in the paid-off landlady's rooming-house, after Lily had been booned with a double ration of lettuce and gum-drops, Lady Luck whispered her benediction above her neglected favorites, and gave unto them her gift of quiet sleep.

CHAPTER III

BUSINESS as usual, on the last day of September, added a little old forty cents to the gross income.

"Sweep de place out again, Demmy, so it looks like us is real busy 'round heah. Folks is like flies —when dey sees somethin' buzzin' dey rallies to help buzz. Wish a auto'beel break down front of dis' place so a crowd would 'cumulate."

"If dat Perdue Grandy prowls dis way, I 'cumulates a crowd. I kicks him loose f'm his shinbones an' butts him breathless befo' de patrol wagon gits here. Ain't gwine sweep out no mo'—got de flo' sweep' so thin naw it sags wid me."

"Nemmine, boy—to-morr' de rainy season comes in an' in dis bizness mud an' money means de same thing."

"Dat's rainbow talk—you sounds cheerful but my ears is set close to my brain."

"Mind whut I tells you—I bet afteh de fust shine is shone to-morr' us don't git no rest a-tall."

As far as mental rest was concerned, the Wildcat won his bet. On the following morning their first customer asked a few questions and then delivered himself of a statement that banished all thoughts of rest. "Your rent is due in advance to-day for the

last quarter. Hundred dollars. I suppose Perdue Grandy explained the terms of the lease to you."

"Hund'ed dollars rent! Lawd an' sinners! You means outgoin' money?"

"I mean the quarterly payment on your lease."

"Naw, suh—dat Perdue neveh 'splained nothin' 'bout dat to me. 'Suaded me. Done mos' de 'splainin' to Demmy." The persuaded one turned to his crumpled partner. "What dat Perdue 'splain to to you, Demmy?"

"Neveh 'splained nothin' 'bout no hund'ed dollars poppin' up right in my face. Only hund'ed dollars I knows about is de cash one I give fo' half dis bizness."

"Same wid me, Cap'n," the Wildcat added. "Us only been runnin' dis bizness two days—ain't learned everythin' 'bout dese rent things yit."

The property agent, realizing the situation and not having to make his own quarterly return, in this instance, until the end of the year, conferred a reprieve and a smile and a bonus of good wishes upon the abject pair. "I'll give you thirty days—you have that money ready for me next time."

The Wildcat took a deep breath. "Cap'n, yessuh! Sho' will. Us kin easy git it afteh de rainy weather begins. Mud is de same as cash to me an' Demmy."

"But not to me. You have that hundred ready. You've got thirty days."

The Wildcat's lower jaw loosened for a moment, at the final phrase of the edict, and when the collector had gone: "Dat thutty-day thing de man said

sounded a lot like a ol' po-lice judge," he observed to Demmy.

"Kinda put de kink in my pussonal spine too, Wildcat, soundin' so nach'ral dat way. Well, you is de boss. I'se swep' out good. Now whut you want me to do?"

"How come I de boss? Us is podners so fur. F'm now on I gives you my half-intrus' in dis place. I lets you be boss an' run de place. All I works fo' is my wages. By rights you is de boss ennyway —all I knows is work, but you kin read an' figger out things an' add up de money whut comes in an' pay me my wages. How long de man say dis lease thing runs yet?"

"Lots longer dan whut us kin, 'less Ol' Man Bizness rises up f'm his sickbed an' 'dorns hisself wid shinin' raiment an' comes a-runnin' 'long Fillmo' street till he gits to whah us is . . . Wilecat, I don't crave to be boss. I got too much outside bizness to 'tend to."

"Such as whut?"

"Well, dere's de foamograph bizness, f'r instance."

"Shucks! Don't you worry none 'bout dat foamograph 'stallment. Dat ain't nuthin'!"

"I ain't—dis time. I got de dollar when de man comes dis time, but dem comin' 'stallments is jus' like a li'l cub bear—you laffs at 'em at fust, den afteh while, when you kain't outrun 'em, dey eats you up."

"Us keeps on laffin', Demmy—some way. Lady Luck gwine to come back befo' long. I knows it.

Us eats to-day, ennyway. Nemmine 'bout dat boss bizness. Us both talks to dese 'stallment folks an' de lease money man nex' month. Lawd, I wish de rain would git heah. Dat Perdue boy sho' talked hisself out of a heavy restin'-job when he talked us into dis Cyclone place."

"Talked hisself loose f'm dis rent man—dat's de main star in his crown. Mebbe us betteh close dis place tempraly fo' repairs an' git into some otheh bizness like de pick an' shovel trade."

"Naw, suh, Demmy. Us rides dis trouble mule to de end of de lane. Lady Luck be waitin' dere to greet us. Ain't gwine quit dis place yet. Neveh leave go no toe holt till yo' hand is reached de money bush, is my slogum. Rent man figgers de same way. If us kain't run dis place, nobody kin. He gits 'suaded when I 'splains it to him real plain."

"Say it wid money, is whut he tells you."

"Say it wid shoes dat's splattered wid money mud."

"He's mighty apt to."

"To whut?"

"Say it wid shoes—kick us loose f'm dis Cyclone bizness."

"Kain't git kicked loose f'm whut you ain't got an' neveh did have. Us ain't had no Cyclone yet a-tall, an' not half dat much bizness."

With persistent fair weather helping his explanations, for October in San Francisco had been fair, the Wildcat managed to explain himself through the business crisis that confronted him on November first. "Widout rain an' mud, o' else plenty dust, nobody

kin git a hund'ed dollars outen dis bizness," he offered. "Me an' Demmy ain't hardly roomed an' et, Cap'n, durin' de las' month, on whut come in," he added, and then, to himself: "Ain't it de truth —damn dem foamograph 'stallments!"

"Well, that was that, and the danger was over for another month. "So is de rain, f'm de way de sky looks, Wilecat."

"Stop a-gazin' at de sky. Look at de ground an' mebbe you finds a dime. Seems like dat's de only way us kin git any money. I'se starved to death. Give dat damn mascot anotheh newspapeh to eat so she stops dat blattin'. Not dat pink papeh. Dem sportin' extry's is heavy digestin' fo' Lily's stummick." He addressed the hungry mascot. "Nemmine, goat, to-morr' mawnin' I gits up early an' grazes you on some gratifyin' weeds."

Throughout November the Cyclone shine business steadied to what appeared to be a fixed average income of a dollar a day. "Sick-money, Demmy. Dat's all it 'mounts to. Kain't live an' kain't die on whut comes in. Foamograph dollar ev'ry week, an' three dollars fo' dat room off de seven us takes in, don't leave 'nuff to keep a minny swimmin' downstream. Good mind to let go right now an' git me a eatin'-job workin' on some of dese buildin's whut's goin' up 'round heah."

"You gits a steady job workin' in de jail does you let go. Dat lease rent man been easy an' pleasant two times now. I figger he stays pleasant till de rain comes. Kain't take in mud money when dey ain't

no mud. Kain't pay out money whut ain't been took in."

The lease man failed to stay pleasant during pleasant weather. He spoke harshly of the law and terminations and evictions and contract executions. The Wildcat shivered under the impact of the volley of syllables, and shuddered at the mention of the threatened execution. "Dey's got us, Demmy," the apprehensive one predicted, when speech returned. "Gwine to be Merry Chris'mus fo' most folks, but its nuthin' but a week f'm de grave fo' us. Heah whut he sez bout de ex'cutions? Stay local does you crave to, but dey mighty soon got to locate me wid bloodhoun's whut kin track a freight train. Aims to sing my ramblin' rag, an' sing it runnin'!

"When de firin'-squab gits ready to shoot dey taps at me,
I'se gwine to be at some place else dan whah I used to be.
An' when de smoke has blew away, f'm whah dey seen me stand,
Dey finds my footprints leadin' to de elsewhere promis' land.

"Dat's me, Demmy, an' you better join de ko-russ!"

"Gittin' away don't bother me as much as comin' back—'tenshun! Ready wid de words an' music! Shine-craver!"

The shine-craving man got his shine without vocal trimmings, for now the minstrel's heart was lead, and mute the lips whence song had flown. "Kain't sing no' mo', Demmy," the Wildcat pleaded, when their patron had gone. "Kain't drag my feet, somehow,

'ceptin' to funeral time. Dey's so much sunshine in de weather dat dey ain't none in my soul . . . wish dat Vicksburg gem'mun come an' cuss me some. Seems like he's de only next of kin whut us is got."

"Chances is he clean fo'gets us by dis time."

"Demmy, you talks like Chicago. Dem Vicksburg white folks neveh fo'gits nuthin'. I bets a hund'ed dollars—mouth money, dat is—dat he stops heah Chris'mus evenin' wid a howdy-do whut makes you homesick."

The Wildcat lost his bet, and the chill of Christmas Eve brought no cheer to the Cyclone twain. "Lady Luck has run off wid ol' Sandy Claws an' left us, fo'got an' alone. You wins dat hund'ed dollar mouth money, Demmy."

"Don't use dat word 'hund'ed' to me no mo', Wilecat. 'Minds me too much of whut dis lease rent man talks about. See kin you speak some pleasant numbers like sixty days in jail whah you eats reg'lar. Jail don't look so bad to me right now. Ain't so much whut you sees as how you looks at it."

"Yo' mouth bulges wid de truth! My slogan is jail fo' joy, an' save me f'm sunburn till June. Lady Luck, jail me, den fo'git my name! Wonder how kin us git into jail, Demmy, widout gittin' dere too perm'nent."

"Kain't see just how at dis minnit. Mabbe yo' damn Lady Luck throws us in befo' she finds out us craves to go."

Lady Luck favored the doleful pair with a threat

of jail on New Year's eve, speaking in the hard accents of the Vicksburg gentleman who was acting, that evening, as her agent.

"You boys ready with that hundred dollars lease money?"

How come this Vicksburg man knew about the hund'ed dollars rent money!

"Captain, naw, suh, Me an Demmy ain't even got a dollah."

"Are you going to have it by Wednesday?"

"Ain't neveh gwine have it whilst Ol' Man Trouble is a-runnin' me an' Demmy ragged."

"There's a wreckin'-crew coming over here Wednesday to get you. Forty wreckers. They're going to tear this house down over your head. You needn't worry, though—there'll be two or three good coffin carpenters in the outfit. The steam shovels begin rootin' in the week after that. They'll dig your graves deep enough to please you."

"Captain, yas, suh. Den whut does they do?"

The Vicksburg man smiled for the first time. "Then they move out and give the concrete men hell-room to start the foundation for the new building that's going up on this property. I got the contract to-day. The owner told me to handle you the best way I knew how. Free coffins and free graves is a fair enough deal, isn't it?"

"Captain, suh, seems like you gwine to misplace two mighty good niggers in dem free graves."

"Well, I compromised your estimated profits for next year with the owner. We figured your lease was

worth five hundred dollars and you owed him a hundred. That leaves you four hundred dollars. Maybe you can get away with a flyin' start before the wreckers get here Wednesday. Of course if you're not here those coffin carpenters won't bother you and the steam shovel crew won't have to dig any free graves."

"You means rightly dat me an Demmy is got fo' hund'ed dollahs an' is free from dis Cyclone place?"

"That's what I mean. As soon as you sign your name."

The Wildcat turned to the pop-eyed Demmy. "Out o' my way! Boy, give me elbone room! Whut I tells you, Demmy, about dis Cyclone bizness? Ain't I said us makes fo' hund'ed dollahs a day, some days? Look at dat street whar it's startin' to rain. Sign yo' name, Demmy, whar de Cap'n tells you. Got to leave heah mighty sudden befo' us gets bogged down neck-deep in de money mud. Whilst de luck rain keeps a-fallin' dey is sunshine in my soul."

CHAPTER IV

A FAST and furious week in Los Angeles, and the money which Lady Luck had given to the Wildcat and Demmy in exchange for the Cyclone shoe-shine business had dwindled to the vanishing point.

Demmy rescued himself by falling into a porter's job in the Pullman service, but the Wildcat elected to thrive along in the wilds of the big city until the goddess of fortune might again bless him with her favor. His last dollar was invested in rations for himself and his mascot goat, and then, sleeping out on the morning after he went broke, he was exposed to seven varieties of marching-orders.

In the noonday of success he had augmented his wardrobe by the purchase of a Prince Albert coat, but in spite of the pomp and power derived from his new raiment he got himself pestered to death and run ragged by policemen whenever he craved to sleep a little on a park bench.

About the time he began to give the sleeping question serious thought, spinning it around in his skull so that he could admire all sides of it, the heavens darkened in their wrath and the rain descended upon Los Angeles and its outdoor prowlers.

Thereafter, navigating a cloudburst and stepping

friendly on his feet, which were tender from overwork, the downtrod pilgrim turned up the collar of his Prince Albert coat and growled an oration at his bedraggled mascot goat. "Foller 'long, Lily, an' quit dat bellerin'! You ain't got half de cause fo' complaint what I is. Yo' skin is rain-proof an' yo' vitals is nutrified wid grass rations. Step 'long proud, rainbow-chaser, whilst us finds a sleepin'-room whut fits me financial."

The Wildcat clutched a solitary dime which lay in the soggy depths of his pants pocket and headed for a tumbledown Jap rooming-house wherein pasteboard partitions bounded apartments that could be rented for ten cents a throw.

At his destination, when the rooming-house man announced that his inside rooms were a dime a day, the Wildcat made sure, first of all, that the day in question was a sleeper's union day of twenty-four hours and not a measly little lodging for the night. The Japanese proprietor of the rooming-house assured him that the day mentioned in the verbal contract was a full-size thirtieth part of November, and, with this meeting of the minds accomplished, the Wildcat relinquished his clutch on the dime and handed it over. "Lead me to it," he directed. "I is so unraveled hongry I'se got to sleep mighty quick to keep f'm starvin'. Come 'long heah, Lily."

The Jap led the way to the third floor of the house and midway of a narrow hallway he opened a door which was swinging on one hinge. There was no window in the room. Half of it was occupied by a

low couch on which was a thin mattress and a single blanket.

"Kain't say dis looks so grand," the Wildcat commented. "Looks like ten cents' wuth, but right now it don't make no diff'runce—I'se too sleepy to be choice. Git 'long wid you—you has yo' dime an' us craves sleep. Heah's whah I buys a million dollahs' wuth fo' ten cents."

When the Jap had left, the Wildcat removed his dripping Prince Albert and threw it over the foot of the cot. He shut the door of the room and turned to his mascot. "Lay down, Lily. Git sleepin'. Dis is yo' home sweet home whilst Lady Luck is huntin' whah at us is."

He sat down on the edge of the bed and began fumbling with the laces of his shoes. He removed one of the shoes but before he got the other one off he had fallen over, sound asleep before he fell.

Twelve hours later, half awakened by the chill of his wet clothes, he reached down and clawed the soggy Prince Albert up over his head. After that, anæsthetized back to dormancy by the heavy air of the little room, he enjoyed the biggest nickel's worth of sleep ever bought with half a dime.

On the following day the ten-cent customer was overlooked by the call-boy with the result that for his dime the Wildcat thrived himself nearly fifty hours' sleep.

His annoyance at being awakened was tempered with gratitude toward the Jap who had aroused him. "Might of laid heah sleepin' till I starved plumb

to death," he reflected, and then, when his host demanded another dime, he used this argument as a counter-accusation in his own defense: "'Stid of payin' you ten cents mo', by rights I ought to collect a dollah damage money f'm you. Whut kind of landlord does you call yo'self whut lets yo' roomers lay down an' dwindle away widout protection f'm dey ravagin' appetites? Go 'long, boy! You gits no ten cents f'm me. Come 'long, Lily, befo' dis man leaves you sleep yo'self into a famished graveyard."

Lily came along, having nothing better to do, and on the street, free again to indulge her appetite, she began grazing on a six-foot parking-strip which appeared to extend from the famine centre to a vanishing point in the land of plenty. The Wildcat permitted his four-legged companion to indulge an overgrown appetite until the sight of Lily's activity became more than he could comfortably tolerate. "Dere you goes—gloatin' proud, right in my face, wid yo' banquit! Makes me double hongry to look at you."

Lady Luck's discarded protégé devoted the next five minutes to the exercise of what was left of his thinking-apparatus.

He searched the pockets of his moist coat three times without finding anything except a practical solution for his difficulties. "Us sells dis coat an' gits money to eat on an' den us gits a job. Come 'long heah, grass-cutter, till you listens to de pawn man talk financial for dis new lodge-goin' Prince Albert."

Four blocks down the street, at a pawnshop, the

reception committee waited stubbornly with a three-dollar last price instead of the ten dollars which the Wildcat had demanded. "Hand it oveh whilst you is still reckless an' neutral," the victim finally conceded. "Dat coat cost me fo'ty dollahs."

When he had received his three dollars, he turned and started out of the pawnshop, but midway of the aisle his attention was arrested by a stack of salvaged military blouses. Over the left breast pocket of the one on top of the stack there bloomed a row of meaningless ribbons counterfeiting the legitimate service ribbons of the army. He picked up the blouse. On the left sleeve were three gold stripes.

"Dat's me!" he reflected. "Dis bright ribbon an' dis heah army coat might be handy to have whilst I'se ramblin' 'round lookin' fo' a job."

He tried the coat on and devoted two minutes to admiring the service ribbons. "How much is you askin' fo' dis coat?"

It developed that the blouse would be sacrificed for two dollars.

The Wildcat left the pawnshop stepping high under the influence of the bright ribbons on the breast. On the sidewalk he barked half a dozen mil'tary orders at the troops. "Lily, 'tenshun! At ease! Fo' de las' time I tells you haid up—an' retreat dat stummick! Don't you neveh fo'git dat de fust position of a soldier is facin' a loaded mess kit. 'Tenshun! For'd march! Foller de eagle bird whut's screamin' de mess call f'm whah he roosted on dis silveh dollah."

The Wildcat resumed his march and now he double-

timed it in the direction of an eating-house hálf a block from the pawnshop. In his hand he clutched the residue of his bargaining and with the silver dollar he proposed to buy himself a cargo of nutriment two sizes larger than his appetite.

Head up, chest out, stummick in, eyes front, he marched with the old swing, straight for the little restaurant. In front of it he executed a perfect column-left, in time to stumble over the mascot goat who had been marching, by reason of her inferior rank, on the Wildcat's port side. In his fall the sleep-walking victim of the military trance landed sprawling in the narrow entrance-way to the little restaurant. He showered down a hurried curse on the mascot goat and then, recovering his mantle of military dignity, he entered the food emporium.

"How much is dese loaves of bread?" he inquired of the man behind a showcase full of ancient-looking bread and pastry.

He discovered that bread was fifteen cents a loaf. He bought one loaf and carried it to a table.

"Bring me three bowls of soup at a nickel a bowl, an' cook up fo' bits' wuth of cheap meat."

The solitary waiter returned with a three-gallon soup kettle and from it he ladled the first installment of the Wildcat's meal. The bread and soup was followed by a cascade of stew whose cabbage leaves and potatoes herded close and friendly with segments of what had been a Texas steer.

To Lily, rejoicing with her master at his ability to eat, there fell three prizes. First of all she got a

quarter of the loaf of bread and then a bowl of soup and then, toward the end of the gorging-contest, two boiled potatoes and half a pound of limp cabbage leaves.

An hour after he had entered the place the Wildcat departed.

At a cigar store he bought two five-cent cigars. He gave one of them to the mascot goat. "Heah you is, wid Lady Luck's compliments! Wait whilst I buys you a smidgin' of lick'riss candy befo' you eats yo' seegar." The Wildcat invested his last nickel in five elastic black strips of rubber licorice, which Lily inhaled as if it had been spaghetti. "Now enjoy yo' tobacco," the Wildcat directed, after the candy was gone. He returned the cigar to the eager goat.

Lily rolled the cigar around between her front teeth and bit off a gratifying inch. "Blaa-a!" As nearly as goat language could be translated, it appeared to the Wildcat that Lily was indulging in an oration of superlative terms of gratitude.

"Dat's all right, goat," he replied. "Ain't I always divode even wid you? Come 'long heah whilst us trails down a job whut pays livin'-wages. I 'spect when folks sees dis army coat dey busts demselves strivin' to see who gits de fust chance to donate a easy bonus job to a old-time vet'ran."

Instinctively the Wildcat reached up and smoothed the chest of the military blouse, caressing for an instant the gaudy strip of ribbons which illumined the area above the left-hand pocket, until his fingers encountered a break in the O.D. fabric. He looked

down and discovered a ragged irregular hole the size of a dollar over to the left of the strip of ribbons.

"Lawd gosh," he reflected, "mebbe some boy gits shot in dis heah coat. I'se wearin' his clo'es an' chances is I draws de same hand whut wuz dealt him by Ol' Man Trouble." He looked again out of the corner of his eyes at the break in the cloth and indulged himself in a sudden deep breath of relief. "Dat ain't no shrapnel hole. Huh! Dat's only dem flyin' cootie moths whut eats old clo'es."

Enjoying the languor induced by his indulgence in food and by the heat of the day, in the closely buttoned O.D. blouse the Wildcat managed to postpone his search for work for an hour after he left the restaurant.

He had walked nearly three miles and his feet were beginning to tighten up in his shoes, which were still damp from the rain-storm of two days before. "Us is fed, Lily," he objected, when the mascot appeared to set a pace too fast for physical comfort. 'Whut makes you such a steady traveler? Lookin' fo' work is all right, but dey ain't no sense goin' blind at it an' wearin' yo' feet plumb off. Come to 'tenshun! Halt yo'self."

The Wildcat halted his impetuous mascot close beside a lamp-post on a busy thoroughfare in the heart of the city.

He leaned against the lamp-post, relaxing a little from his military bearing in favor of a chronic fatigue which seemed to possess him. The lamp-post was a corrugated column and, much to the leaner's satis-

faction, he discovered that the bones and tissues of his shoulder fitted comfortably into one of the corrugations of the post.

Anchored north and south, and leaning heavy, the Wildcat closed his eyes against the glare of the sunlight. To his delight he discovered that the world was a more comfortable place to live in the moment he closed his eyes. He opened them and instantly reacted to the turmoil about him. "Dis place sho' looks all excited about sumpin'."

He closed his eyes again as a shield against the excitement, and this time they stayed closed for thirty seconds. He blinked them open again at the explosive note of an automobile horn close beside him, but immediately his eyelids fell and his head sagged over against the iron standard.

His hat, an unyielding brown derby, served as an awkward buffer that prevented his head from finding a harbor against the lamp-post. He reached up and clutched the brown derby in his right hand. Then, while the muscles of his lower jaw relaxed, his drooping head found its haven against the substantial iron.

In a moment Lily was attracted by a gentle snoring with which her master was ornamenting the trick of being asleep on his feet.

The mascot reached up and nibbled gently at the ribbon binding the brim of the hard brown derby. The Wildcat wiggled his hand, and to the passer-by, at that moment, it appeared that the hat was being

supported mutually between the upright figure and his four-legged companion.

Five minutes from the time the Wildcat fell asleep, a six-year-old girl, equipped with good-behaviour money, succumbed to the emotions inspired by the attractions festooning the lamp-post and piloted her mamma on a detour which permitted the contribution of a five-cent piece to the poor tired soldier. She was followed by a gentleman, slightly intoxicated as a result of a business conference at his club, who responded to the charity complex to the extent of twenty-five cents.

As well as she could, while still nibbling on the brown derby, Lily followed the two contributors with her rolling eyes, and then returned to the business of munching a neat sector out of the felt fabric which she had stripped of an inch of its silk binding.

It was then that a stranger within the gates of the city, a kindly old lady, approached the somnolent Wildcat and shook her head sweetly at the sight of the gaudy strip of ribbons adorning his chest. Her sympathy quickened to a more practical form of expression and her dimpled fingers explored a gold mesh bag packed with currency and silver and two copper pennies.

The pennies clinked down upon the twenty-five-cent piece and on the instant the Wildcat jerked his eyes open in response to the sound of money talking to him.

He looked at the lady standing before him and

his gaze fell quickly into the depths of the brown derby where, smiling cheerfully, lay an eagle, two Indians and one buffalo, stamped on silver, copper and nickel.

"Cash, rally 'round!" the Wildcat mumbled. "See whut Lady Luck done showered down!"

He looked again at the lady before him and framed his thanks to fit the twenty-five-cent piece. "Thank you, ma'am!" he said. "Me an' Lily sho' 'preciates whut you is done. Times is mighty hard now'days on us boys. Kain't hardly git along none since de fightin' stopped after us shock troops licked dem German boys."

The lady smiled at him. "Were you in France?" she asked.

"Lady, sometimes when I thinks how long wuz I in France it seems like I neveh wuz no place else. Yas-sum! Sho' wuz. Goes oveh befo' de fust graft troops an' stays detailed till afteh de buryin'-squabs got married to dem war bribes. Got me three service stripes."

Then, seeking to improve his effect, the Wildcat fumbled with the ragged hole which the moths had eaten over to the left of the spurious service ribbons. "One lump of dat screamin' shrapnel meets me right heah."

His right hand, having functioned as an index to the scars of battle, fell to his side, where his fingers, clutching the lower edge of his blouse, jerked quickly to smooth the wrinkles which had formed with his previous gesture. Offering hardly more resistance

than a wet blotter, a piece of shoddy material as big as the palm of his hand came away in his fingers. He looked sideways, avoiding the lady's eyes, and then quickly he stuffed the scrap of cloth into Lily's open mouth.

His hand, free now from its embarrassing cargo, explored the sides of the blouse and travelled around over those areas which could be reached without tying the reacher into a knot.

In a ten-second exploration the Wildcat discovered five more holes in the back of the blouse, varying from buckshot size to some which might have been made by a triangular fragment of stove-lid.

"Lawd gawd, Lady Luck!" he prayed. "Us sho' hopes dis white lady don't do no 'vestigatin' 'round behind me. Looks like most of my wounds wuz got afteh de heavy retreatin' begun."

The kindly white lady evidenced no further curiosity concerning the extent of his wounds. She seemed to extend the charity of belief to his general summary of his suffering, and then, while he was indulging his imagination in the recital of his war experience, the lady interrupted him. "Do you say you are experienced in driving automobiles?"

"Lady, yas-sum! Us drives ennything. Started drivin' spikes in de Bo'deaux warehouses. Graduated to fire department mules an' den on up de line to auto'-beels. By rights I'se a make-ignition. I makes ignition in dese heah spark plugs. Sho' do!"

"Have you had any experience with electric cars?" the inquiring lady continued.

"'Lectric cars? Lady, I 'spect de mos' ridin' us eveh done wuz in 'lectric cars."

The Wildcat was thinking of trolley cars and meanwhile the lady who was conducting the cross-examination thought of the excellent appearance that this straight-backed young soldier would make, dressed in the maroon livery of her former chauffeur, and seated at the steering-bar of her maroon-colored electric phaeton.

A little confused on the electric car deal, the Wildcat was about to ask his benefactor if she had hired a conductor, believing, modestly, that what the conductor's job lacked in opportunities for spectacular gong-ringing might be made up in a steadier exhibition of verbal authority, directed, in the manner of a sheepherder, at scurrying patrons of the vehicle in question.

He pictured himself, stepping folks forward in courteous tones and prodding members of his own race into activity with well-chosen commands, grinding cash fares with his right hand and jerking signals on the bell cord with his left.

A long series of questions surged up as far as his neck, only to be choked to death by the sudden realization that the lady addressing him must be a mighty rich lady to possess a personal trolley car. He decided that he might get along better with no questions asked.

The lady produced a card from her handbag and with a gold pencil, after a moment's manipulation of the lead which had retreated to the vanishing point,

she wrote her address upon her card. She handed the card to the Wildcat. "I am Mrs. J. Carter Felton," she explained. "Twenty-five hundred Sanchez Street is my house address in San Diego." She handed the Wildcat a ten-dollar bill. "This will pay your fare. Your wages will be one hundred and fifty dollars a month."

The Wildcat took Mrs. Felton's card and blinked at it. When the ten-dollar bill appeared he parked the card in the lining of his hat and with the greenback held gingerly between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand he blinked more rapidly and swallowed heavily until the mention of wages accomplished the third and last stage of the trance into which he was lapsing. Dimly to his ears came Mrs. Felton's parting instructions. "You will report at my San Diego house to-morrow."

"Yass-sum!"

The Wildcat's agreement to all conditions was vehement and absolute, and then with a smile Mrs. Felton walked away. She was followed for fifty feet by a grateful look from the Wildcat. Then he remembered the ten-dollar bill which still dangled publicly from his palsied hand and his vision was clouded with a series of tableaux where dollar signs and fried chicken splashed around in a platter whose perimeter was dotted with alternate areas of spinach greens, yams and chicken gravy.

He stored the bank-note in the lining of the brown derby hat along with Mrs. Felton's card and without

further loss of time he turned to Lily and dished out enough marching-orders to have worn the legs off a regiment of mascot goats.

With Lily trailing along behind him, he headed down the thoroughfare toward a place where a quick compromise ration of cold water and hot fish could be bought for cash.

Midway of the march to the restaurant he stopped long enough to discover the exact amount of the fare to the city where Mrs. Felton lived. "Cap'n, suh," he asked the ticket agent back of the counter of a downtown office, "whut's de no-come-back fare to dis heah Sam Dago town?"

The seeker after knowledge discovered the amount of the fare and fixed upon an appropriation from the ten-dollar bill which would enable him to eat himself within a dollar of being broke.

"Come 'long, Lily. Us is got a ragin' appetite an' plenty of money to unrage it wid. Double-time yo'-self, goat, till us floods dis ten-dollah bill wid chicken gravy an' fixin's."

"Blaa-a!" Lily, knowing but one master, shifted gears into double time, and presently, seated on the floor beside the Wildcat's chair in a restaurant, she gave thanks to her own gods for the sudden rush of food that the day had brought forth.

When the meal was finished, the Wildcat navigated a course, buoyed by interrogation, until finally his troubles ended, temporarily, with the starting of a train from which he alighted to face whatever might await him in the city of San Diego.

CHAPTER V

IT was late evening when the Wildcat arrived at the Felton residence on Sanchez street in San Diego. He decided that the first heavy work to be done was to overdraw on the bank of sleep in his new quarters above the garage, which stood well back on the grounds surrounding the Felton house.

From a window of his room the Wildcat looked at the house. "Sho' seems to be a big place, but dey ain't many folks 'round."

He turned and inspected his new uniform. It was a maroon-colored livery, decked out with black tape. About the only fault the Wildcat found with it was that the buttons were black bone where he would have preferred polished brass. "Kain't complain tho'," he said to Lily, for whom quarters had been arranged under a work bench against the wall of the garage. "Us is settin' noble, an' warm. Got a grand big auto'beel to run. Grand place to sleep, an' de rations is heavy."

Surrounded by the blessings which Lady Luck had showered down, the Wildcat slept soundly throughout the night. He was awakened at nine o'clock the next morning by a bell ringing near the head of his bed.

" 'Spect dey wants me at de house," he surmised,

and forthwith he climbed into the maroon uniform. From the pockets of his side-tracked raiment he transferred eighty cents in cash and the card bearing Mrs. Felton's address. He pinned his service ribbons to the breast of the maroon uniform and reported two minutes later at the kitchen, where he figured a little breakfast might precede orders for the day.

Word reached him here, while he was doing the best he could with his rations, that Mrs. Felton would want her car at two o'clock, and these orders were augmented by a little free advice from the cook to the effect that he might as well put the intervening time in polishing the metalwork on the car and dolling it up to the point of glittering perfection.

The Wildcat, accepting orders and advice, set to work after breakfast in shining up the car. He tried his best to devote himself to the outside of the vehicle but he was irresistibly attracted to the driver's compartment, where, perched over to the right of the driver's seat, Lily sat and superintended the Wildcat's work.

The superstructure of the car, built to Mrs. Felton's own designs, included a forward enclosure for the driver, separated from the passenger department by a heavy plate of glass.

On the instrumental panel the Wildcat recognized a cigar-lighter, a clock and a speedometer, but beyond these familiar mechanisms the rest of the brass and nickel and enamel dials with their blue steel needles meant nothing at all in his professional career.

He seated himself now and then in the driver's seat

and tentatively hauled the steering-bar back and forth.

Along around noon he had become familiar enough with his new machine to begin a series of experiments with the switches and controls on the instrument board, but beyond discovering the light switches no startling record of success rewarded his investigations.

"One thing sho', Lily," he said, by the time his stomach suggested that lunch could be received if necessary, "one thing sho', us knows lots about whut dese ain't."

For the fiftieth time his eyes swept the complex array of metal. "Yas-suh, goat, nobody knows whut dese things ain't no betteh dan us does."

He tried an insignificant-looking switch heretofore neglected which was fixed beside two of its fellows over to the left of the panel, and immediately from the interior of the battery-filled paunch of the car there came a gentle whine.

"Sho' sounds like a li'l dawg—sounds like a puppy whinin' fo' his suppeh."

He snapped the switch again and the whining ceased.

"See dat, Lily! Ain't no puppy. Kain't turn no puppy on an' off wid no 'lectric switch. Us knows 'lectricity. Knows it real good."

He tried the next switch and to his great satisfaction there resulted an imitation of what a bulldog might say if sufficiently agitated.

"See dat, Lily! Dis heah car sho' is haunted wid 'lectric dawgs. Heah dat bulldawg growl. Mebbe dat number-three switch turns on ol' bayin' hound.

Mebbe if us turns all three on togetheh it sounds like a dawg fight! Ain't got time to 'vestigate now. You sit heah whilst I 'sorbs my lunch, an' don't git no mo' of dem white hairs on dis heah cushion. Stay on yo' own side. 'Spect I likes to go prancin' 'round in dis grand bull-blood unifawm like a gin'ral all danglin' wid goat hairs? Naw-suh! Lay down on de flo' does you crave to, but keep yo'self away f'm dese cushions. Afteh I'se et I brings you yo' rations back wid me an' den I sees is dey enny mo' dawgs hid 'round in dis fo'-wheeled showcase."

When the Wildcat came back with his mascot's rations, he boosted Lily out of her place beside the driver's seat of the four-wheeled showcase and resumed his search for something which might animate the dormant mechanism until the concealed dog fight should be translated from sound to motion.

His search was interrupted by a peremptory order called to him by the cook. "It's two o'clock. Mrs. Felton says to bring the car over at the door like I told you before, and hurry up about it."

"Yass-sum! I'se a-comin'!"

The Wildcat, in his panic, sought the consolation invariably afforded him by the presence and sympathy of his mascot goat. He reached over and opened the door of the driver's compartment. "Git in heah, Lily! Whut you mean delayin' dis heah trip so long? Clumb up and lay down befo' I knocks yo' face down yo' throat."

Lily made haste to obey her master's voice and it was well that she did so, for almost on the instant that

the Wildcat reached out and closed the door of the car with his right hand after the goat was aboard, his fumbling left hand, playing frantically along the keyboard of switches and push buttons, pulled the trigger on the four-wheeled showcase. It started with a jump and before it had cleared the doors of the garage it settled into a conservative fifteen-mile speed which nothing so trivial as a panic-stricken brunette brainstorm could accelerate or retard.

Down the hundred-foot driveway leading to the doorway where Mrs. Felton stood awaiting her car, the Wildcat confirmed his belief in his inability to stop.

He grabbed the steering-lever with his left hand and juggled it until the car quit staggering and straightened out on the roadway, while with his right hand he sought frantically for something on the instrument board which when pushed, pulled or twisted would turn the hose on the dog fight beneath him. An instant before he reached the doorway where Mrs. Felton was waiting for him, the snarling and whining in the sagging paunch of the vehicle gave way to a silence broken only by the snorts of emotion with which the Wildcat expressed his surprise.

Passing Mrs. Felton, the Wildcat saw that lady take one step forward, where she remained waiting for the car to stop. It passed her, going fifteen miles an hour. The Wildcat turned an anguished glance in the direction of his employer and then he resumed his business of steering while, in the wake of the car, a puzzled lady stared after him. Two little wrinkles

formed on her brow and her mouth shaped itself around the O of surprise as in "what-o!"

Where the driveway met the street, the Wildcat capitalized his long experience with vehicles drawn by four-legged motive power. He glanced quickly to the right and left. He found the way clear and swung sharply in the latter direction.

Ahead of him stretched endless miles of comparatively open roadway and before he had covered the first mile his panic had given way to a philosophic calm, which was interrupted now and then at street intersections where once or twice the aid of Lady Luck was frantically invoked.

After the third mile, glimpsing a long vista of highway, the engineer of the rolling dog fight recovered his speech. "Heah us is, Lily! Dis is de fust time I'se eveh started on my way an' knowed 'zackly whah at I wuz headed. Hell-bound—dat us! Dey ain't no stoppin' an' dey ain't no goin' back."

His philosophy was interrupted at the seventh mile when he overtook a slow-speed bootlegger returning with a five-ton truck to his source of supply, over the Mexico line, in Tia Juana. He managed to avoid the bootlegger, but half an hour later he added a substantial increment to his burden of offenses by busting an international boundary wide open, without knowing it.

Followed by the cries of two or three languid Mexican customs guards, he sailed grandly into a new country.

Before him, down what appeared to be the main

street of a little town, a vista of two-story houses was disclosed. At three o'clock he traversed the main street of Tia Juana in the glaring sunshine of one of the town's characteristic afternoons.

A signboard, displaying a three-foot glass of beer, together with an Arabic numeral indicating that the beer could be obtained for a quarter, reminded him of an acute thirst and awakened an ambition which grew with each succeeding moment. "Whuff! Sho' is hot in de inside of dis ramblin' stove. Lawd Gosh, us craves whut dat sign shows!"

His vision, distracted for the moment from the business of staring straight ahead at the road, settled intermittently on a varying succession of signs adorning the fronts of something less than a million saloons. In the shady recesses of these heavenly annexes he saw thirsty men milling around and glimpsed some lucky individual now and then in the act of lifting a large and foaming glass of beer to his eager lips. Farther along the line he caught a glimpse of a white table, loaded with free lunch, fronting a bar above which four electric fans agitated the froth on the fleet of schooners of lager which were being steered toward a group of thirsty hop-skippers.

He determined to get out of his sunburnt showcase if it killed him.

"Folks dies only once," he said to Lily. "Mebbe I breaks my neck an' if I does it's betteh dan chokin' to death in plain view of de promised land."

He detoured from the roadway and swung the car into an open field that lay ahead of him. He held the

steering-lever hard over and the car began travelling in a fifty-foot circle. He shoved his knee against the steering-lever and reached down and began fumbling with the string that laced his left shoe. After he had secured a two-foot section of this shoelace he tied the steering-lever in position, binding it to the winding-stem of the clock on the instrument board. Then, relieved for the moment of the necessity of steering the car, which was still running true to its established orbit, he opened the door to his left, and stood on the running-board.

He called forth a farewell order to Lily. "Lay down, goat, an' stay whah you is. Behave yo'self whilst I saves my life back at dat saloon. Afteh while I gits somebody whut knows how to stop dese heah travellin' dawg fights an' comes back."

A moment later he was gratified to discover, when he had unrolled himself, that his thirst was still intact.

He stood like a circus trainer in the center of the circle around which the car was running and then his dreams of immediate indulgence in liquid pleasures were shattered by the sight of the mascot goat, erect now on all four legs and nibbling at the string which bound the steering-lever in position.

"Lay off dat string!" the Wildcat yelled. "Quit eatin' dat shoe string befo' you rides to hell in dat rollin' dawg fight!"

His words were in vain and his admonition ended about the time Lily succeeded in severing the luscious shoe-string. The car headed square across the adjoin-

ing highway, straightened out of its circle, and began a staggering path to whatever perdition might await it in the surrounding territory.

With one jump, actuated by an impulse to rescue his mascot, the Wildcat was galvanized into racing action. He bore down upon the car and leaped for the running-board. His fingers clutched at the handle of the door and he realized that he had gained his goal. He rested for a moment, and then with the skill of a contortionist he edged around the open door and regained his place in the driver's seat of the wandering vehicle. He showered down a series of hearty oaths upon his four-legged mascot and then, straightening out his course, he steered for the highway.

Two seconds later, starting back through the town which he had so recently escaped, he began to use all of his mental faculties for wishing purposes, because, lining the narrow road before him and headed toward him, trotting along and bellowing under a cloud of dust, urged by the fervent cries of half a dozen Mexican cowpunchers, there appeared a herd of long-horned beef cattle.

In the rapidly lessening space which lay between the Wildcat and the oncoming turmoil, the Wildcat reviewed most of his early life, maintaining the while a sideline of supplications to Lady Luck.

He tried, in vain, to turn the car around in the narrow street. He called into play all of the first-aid facilities which his early religious training had afforded. He discarded these, when the gap had short-

ened to a hundred feet, in favor of a tense prayer to his old-time master, the white man who had never failed him. "Cap'n Jack, whah at is you? Come an' git me an' Lily befo' you views de remains!"

Then, instinctively, seeming to hear Captain Jack's command thundering in his ears, he swung the steering-handle hard over and columned-left down a narrow alley lined on both sides with a collection of adobe houses.

In this tortuous channel there was no time for reflecting upon his luck in escaping collision with the trotting steers. The alley was paved with cobblestones. It was a blind lead, without intersections, and it ran its staggering course, barely wide enough for a bootlegger's truck, to the back wall of the Full House Saloon.

The Wildcat got his first view of the back wall of the Full House establishment when he rounded a sharp curve.

Then and there, he disclaimed all responsibility for whatever further curses Old Man Trouble might inflict. As far as he was personally concerned, he had gorged himself on his menu of misery. He was fed up.

He reached over quickly, while the fender of the car was yet twenty feet away from the pine boards that formed the back wall of the saloon, and shoved Lily down to the floor of the car. "Lay low, fool, whilst yo' pussonal fragments mingles wid dis scenery."

His words were followed by the impact of the colli-

sion and then in a crash of splintering pine, punctuated by the shrill screeching of dry nails breaking contact with the wood about him, the car plowed its way through the back wall of the Full House.

Groggy, but still in the ring, it headed across the open area in front of the long bar. It plowed a furrow through a milling mass of leaping patrons of the establishment whose record-breaking jumps landed them in the sanctuary of various gambling-layouts to the left.

The front wall of the Full House was laid up in adobe bricks. The wall was two feet thick.

Against this wall the Wildcat ended his ride.

He opened his eyes and looked about him. The tumult of the dog fight had died out in the paunch of the car and the voices of the surging crowd subsided to where the bleating of the mascot goat sounded above the dwindling chorus.

The Wildcat opened the door of the car. He stepped down from the driver's seat and turned instinctively to the bar. At the moment he was the calmest member of the assemblage. He fished around in his pocket and hauled out a quarter. He laid the quarter on the bar. "Cap'n, suh," he said to the bartender before him, "us craves a glass of beer. Seems like some real cool beer sho' might taste noble durin' dis hot spell."

For ten minutes thereafter the hot spell got hotter, and the heat was induced by the high-tension language which burned from the superheated vocabulary of the proprietor of the Full House Saloon, but when

the local excitement had resulted in an immediate and abnormal increase in trade occasioned by an influx of interested citizens, the Wildcat's sentence was reduced from sudden death to the cost of repairing the shattered back wall of the saloon.

An impromptu and inexpert jury appraised the cost of repairs and its report was relayed to the Wildcat who was just then enjoying his third glass of beer. He set the empty glass on the bar and wiped his lips with the back of his hand. "Hund'ed dollahs? Cap'n suh, I ain't got no hund'ed dollahs—all I got left is mebbe fo' bits."

Then it appeared that by several profane deities the brimstone cost of repairing the qualified wall would be worked out by the invader or else, looming large in the immediate future, a first-class sun-kissed calaboose might shelter the beer-craving protégé of the absent Lady Luck.

"Cap'n, yass-suh. Me an' Lily sho' be glad to work fo' you heah till us pays fo' de damage. Whut job does you crave us to do?"

The proprietor of the Full House had but one job to offer. "Cleanin' up 'round here—heavy-weight swamper, and on the job wrastlin' beer kegs."

Heaven has varying definitions. Inwardly the Wildcat felt a glow of contentment at the good fortune which had imposed itself upon him under an assumed name. "Cap'n, yass-suh! Whah at is dese beer kegs?"

"The bartenders will tell you. Whatever they

say, you do—for a full month. A month's work is worth a hundred dollars to me."

The Wildcat figured that a month's work in a cool saloon, with a free lunch annex, was worth a million dollars, but except for agreeing heartily to everything the white man said, he offered no comment, because the resumption of business about the gambling-tables included a distracting solo of encouragement directed toward a pair of dice.

The invader's fingers began to itch. It looked like Lady Luck might be presiding over his immediate future. By the time the white man had pronounced sentence upon him, his attention was divided, fifty-fifty, between the white man's words and the chorus of phrases that followed the spotted-fever cubes on their tumbling expeditions across the green cloth of the table about which the crap-shooting conclave was in session.

He twisted his left foot, aiming it instinctively toward the crap game, and when the proprietor of the Full House turned away, the four-bit financier dwindled out of the picture, to emerge life-size a moment later in the circle of frenzied freckle-cravers.

Until his opportunity came to declare himself with the humility appropriate to a fifty-cent bet, he made himself as inconspicuous as possible, and then when the moment came that marked new ownership of the dice, he addressed his modest declaration to the hard-boiled banker. "Shoots fo' bits. Start middlin' small an' builds up big."

The dice that rolled toward him seemed to linger in his hand only long enough to receive a new impulse that carried them rattling against the barrier on the far side of the table, but when their legend became legible they displayed the first seven of an unbroken series that was interrupted on the fifth pass by a pair of fours.

"Fo' an' fo'. Eight me, Lady Luck, fo' eight dollahs. Two balloons! Naught and naught, git froze! Dat's six, an' I'se buildin' up. Jump de seven, Decatur debbils. Whuff—an' I reads six an' a two. Shoots de sixteen. Fade me, bank man, whilst de one an six parades!"

The bank man faded the sixteen.

With his thumb the Wildcat twisted the twin cubes along the tips of his fingers. "Pale an' painful. Bam—an' I reads six-ace. Seven is sufficient! Thirty-two dollahs. I'se a self-startin' Wilecat an' I shoots thirty-two. Shower down yo' money, brotheh, whilst us 'sass'nates one mo' seven. I'se seeded wid sevens an' I aims to sprout."

The thirty-two was showered down and the self-starter resumed his activity. "Door dice, open on seven. Wham! Dey closes on four-three. De seven seed sprouts de money crop an' reaps sixty an' fo'."

The Wildcat stored away the ragged end of his winnings and began his second round of the battle with a fifty-dollar bet.

"Shoots de fifty, proud an' pretty. Fade an' fall back! I'se a rollin' dawg-house an' I kain't stop.

I'se dawg twins an' my name is five-six. Sick 'em, five! Pay-roll dice, roll yo' pay! Wham, an' de spotted fever reveals de six-five. I lets it lay. Shoots de hund'ed. Shower down, bank man—dat's it. Greenbacks, meet yo' twins! Bone babies, 'filiate fren'ly wid de five-six. 'Leven, I craves. Lady Luck, boon me! Crazy bones, hit yo' point. Whuff—an' de smilin' six an' a fren'ly five sez two hund'ed frog skins!"

The owner of the frog-skin money let it lie until the banker covered the bet.

"Handy dice, repeat an' rest. Shoots de two hund'ed an' retreats. Fade me befo' I fades away—dat's it, two hund'ed. Reapin' babies, harvest yo' heaven wid a last-time seven. Stand back, folks, whilst dese spotted houn' dawgs ketches dat rabbit money!

> "'Way down heah whah de sevens bloom,
> I craves me lots of el-bone room;
> Baptized once but backslid twice,
> I kneels an' prays to de agile dice.

"Bam! Count de votes. Civil Wah said de slave wuz free—in sixty-one. Six-one—dat's seven!"

The Wildcat picked up his four-hundred-dollar stack of currency and stored it away. He turned to his mascot goat. "Hot dam, Lily, now us kin buy us free! Life, lib'rality an' bokoo beer—dat's my slogum. Come heah wid me whilst us settles wid dis saloon cap'n fo' de damage dat sunburnt dawg-house done whilst prowlin' in de back wall."

He sought the proprietor of the saloon and forthwith bought himself free from his new job with a proffered handful of bank-notes. "Cap'n, suh, I'se counted a hund'ed dollahs in heah an' I sho' is sorry about de buildin' gittin' bruised wid dat hell-bound auto-beel. Kin you tell me, please, suh, whah at us kin find some boy whut kin drive dat non-stop demon back to de lady in Sam Dago?"

The proprietor, pacified by the proffered cash, directed the Wildcat to a garage among whose experts in plain and fancy mechanical problems were numbered half a dozen men capable of controlling the San Diego lady's car.

Half an hour later, bearing no visible traces of the accident except a few quickly drying areas of enamel, Mrs. Felton's car was headed back toward its owner's residence in San Diego. Neatly folded in a package on the rear seat lay the maroon uniform, minus the strip of service ribbons which had embellished the coat, and in the driver's pocket was ten dollars to compensate Mrs. Felton for the railroad fare she had advanced the Wildcat in Los Angeles.

The service ribbons were just then in the pocket of a newly purchased suit of overalls which adorned the Wildcat's anatomy. The overalls were three sizes too large for him, but this condition was a deliberate choice on the Wildcat's part.

"Us likes 'em plenty big, Cap'n, suh," he had explained to the man in the store where he purchased his new costume. "Dis heah cool beer an' hot lunch is mighty bulgin', an' I aims to bulge me plenty whilst

I kin. Dis beer-drinkin' is 'zactly like dat ol' lectric showcase whut kidnapped me an' Lily out of Sam Dago—starts easy whah you least expects, an' kain't hardly be stopped."

CHAPTER VI

I

THE Wildcat decided that the main trouble with folks in the town of Tia Juana was their ignorance. "Ain't no sense to whut dese boys talks," he reflected. "Dey is jest like dem gabblin' French niggers whut talks like white folks gargling a sore throat. Kain't make dese boys out none, 'ceptin' when dey sez no—and den mostly dey don't mean it. I craves to 'filiate me wid sociable folks," he complained to Lily, his mascot goat, who was lying inert on the bare ground beside the barrel-stave hammock swung between two pepper trees whereon the Wildcat had draped his languid anatomy.

His retrospective objections centered on food and drink and he included *tortillas* and *tiquila* and *aguadiente*. "Ask dem is two bits 'nuff fo' six measly li'l corn cakes, an' right off dey 'members human talks an' tells you no. Ask dem does dey crave a slug of dis heah likker dey calls Tikkla, or mebbe dat fool-soundin' blazin' drink dey calls Wawa Dinty, an' dey blats something like 'Sassenger' right in yo' face. Kain't make head or tails of whut dey sez, an' de white folks in dis place is too busy 'sorbin' dey pussonel

likker to pass de time of day wid a downtrod nigger whut is plum lonely."

Until the sunset hour the Wildcat rested himself in his barrelstave hammock and enjoyed the misery that hunger for the companionship of one's kind can mean. He roused himself after sundown and untied Lily's clothes-line halter from the trunk of a pepper tree under which the pair of sidetracked wanderers had enjoyed their prolonged siesta. "Come 'long heah, goat," he ordered. "Us is 'quipped wid ration money whut craves to git spent."

On his way to the lunch counter which enjoyed his patronage, the Wildcat added a further clause to his specifications of discontent. "Dese folks don't even know whut to eat, let alone whut to drink—fumblin' 'round all de time wid sausages and leather pancakes an' red-hot beans. I likes my beans hot, but I likes dem stove-hot instead of pepper-hot. I likes riz pancakes. Sausages I tolerates. How come dey eats sausages wid so many chickens runnin' wild 'round dese back yards, sho' beats me. I 'spect befo' long I gits desp'rate and barbecues me a pullet some dark night." Then, rich in knowledge, he amended his last idea. "You barbecues nuthin' in dis land," he said to himself aloud. "So long as dese crazy folks is got oneway doors on dey jails, you hives up yo' pullet crave like a old honeybee savin' clover juice."

"Come long heah, Lily. For two cents I goes back to dat Sam Dago town or Los Anxious an' lets dese gabblin' fools git 'long de best dey could widout me."

He held the screen door open for Lily to precede

him into the Mexican restaurant. "Git in, goat, befo' de flies gits out!" Lily shook her head violently and sneezed a large blue-bottle fly from where that insect had perched itself on the tip of her nose. "Go oveh by dat candy counter an' lay down. De flies won't botheh you so much whilst dey is enny candy left. Lay steady whilst I deceives my stummick wid dese fool rations."

Ten minutes later, with his dull anger smothered under a makeshift blanket of corn cakes and beans, the Wildcat paid his bill with a counterfeit fifty-cent piece which he had received in change at the lunch counter that morning.

This time the fat proprietor back of the counter gave the Wildcat a quarter in change and the coin was palpably bad. The recipient looked at it and then without evident effort he bent the coin double and handed it back to the Mexican. He was through now with his Mexican environment and the spurious quarter had been the final detail of impulse back of his sudden resolve. "Give dis to somebody whut owns a bullet mould," he said, "and de next time you sees me and dis mascot goat tromplin' through de land—shoot me! 'Cause if I comes back heah, it's a sho' sign dey ain't no place on earth fit to live in."

The disgruntled customer left the lunch counter and picked up his mascot's leading-string, and, followed by the caustic Castilian of the fat proprietor of the place, they walked through the open screen door.

The night had become cooler and for a moment the Wildcat was tempted to undertake a forced march to

San Diego, but immediately thereafter consideration for his personal feet caused him to change his mind. He headed for a building up the street in front of which the stages for San Diego took on their passengers, and within the hour he had paid his fare and had perched himself on the rear seat of the long automobile stage. At his feet, seemingly content with the knowledge that the flies and the fleas and the other discomforts of the town were to be left behind them, the mascot goat lay absorbed in the pleasurable occupation of eating six heads of crisp lettuce which her master had purchased for her evening meal.

II

On the morning after his arrival in San Diego, seeking a wider sphere of entertainment than that which the small town afforded, and travelling with the confidence inspired by the possession of something over forty dollars, the Wildcat continued his journey northward, selecting as his mode of travel the automobile stage which runs between San Diego and Los Angeles.

In the warm sunlight of a California afternoon, the Wildcat climbed down from the seat in the automobile stage at his destination. He reached back for his mascot's leading-string. "Jump down heah, Lily, and unkink dem laigs! Come 'long wid me whilst us 'filiates social wid some niggehs whut kin understand plain talk."

He stopped at a near-by refreshment stand and indulged himself in a gratifying drink. "As you is, goat, whilst us 'sorbs dis sass'prilla." The first cold drink was followed by a second, and with this purchase the thirsty customer got a ten-cent package of sticky popcorn which he gave to his four-legged companion. 'Nutrify yo'self wid dis 'lasses poppercorn, an' does you behave noble mebbe I gits you a bag of goober peas."

Lily testified her appreciation of the delicacy by eating the sweetened popcorn as fast as her munching jaws could tear into it and then, as a chaser, she devoted the next thirty seconds to the business of devouring the red paraffin paper in which the crisp confection had been wrapped.

Refreshed for the moment, the Wildcat began a double-time march toward a district where he could encounter congenial members of his race.

Trailing along behind him at the end of her clothes-line tether, his mascot trotted at a gait which was interrupted now and then by little impromptu nips at bunches of grass which grew in the parking-strips between the sidewalk and pavement. At each of these interruptions the Wildcat jerked violently on Lily's halter. "Come 'long heah an' don't delay me! Us craves to mingle with social folks whut kin talk plain talk once mo'."

In that section of the city to which he journeyed, the Wildcat was a little bit disappointed in his failure to discover the social folks whom he sought. "How come everybody so busy trailin' 'round? Seems like

dey ain't nobody doin' no loafin' in dis town! Don't nobody neveh rest?"

His questions were directed at the brunette proprietor of the Little Dixie Billiard Parlor.

"Most of de boys is too busy wid jobs of work to do any day-time loafin'."

"So I sees. 'Spect most of yo' bizness goes on at night?"

"Brotheh, you 'spects right! Whah does you hail f'm?"

"Hails f'm Memphis mostly. Me an' dis mascot is done some prowlin' since de Memphis days."

"I 'spect you has!" The proprietor of the Little Dixie was silent for a moment and then: "Nawsuh, folks down heah is like ennyplace else. When dey works dey thrives, an' when dey sets idle de police gits dem afteh just so long! Dis is a hustlin' town, an' de main slogum is Come and Go—come to town an' go to work!"

"Sho' is!" The Wildcat felt that the information directed at him was a bit of more or less personal advice. "I aims to git me a job right away," he affirmed, and then, having committed himself, he elaborated his statement with plans and specifications for the immediate future. "Chances is me an' Lily mingles back wid de Pullman folks right off."

"Dat is de best job whut is. I run Pullman goin' on twenty yeahs befo' I 'cumulates cash 'nuff to buy dis bizness. Sometimes I wished I wuz back—kinda git lonesome for de big towns. Ain't seed N'Yawk an' Chicago an' N'Oluns an' Detroit an' St. Louis f'r goin'

on ten yeahs. Sho' is grand to travel 'round an' round!"

"Sho' is!" the Wildcat agreed. "Kain't be no job mo' grander." His statement was freighted with the fervor of a sudden ambition which had been inspired by the older man's words. A quick review of the trails of distant yesterdays fed the fires of ambition.

"Whah at is dese Pullman folks located down heah?" he asked.

The proprietor of the Little Dixie directed him to the local offices which he sought, and five minutes later, with Lily safely parked in a back room of the Little Dixie, the Wildcat set out with the deliberate purpose of achieving a porter's job in the Pullman service.

Within the hour he had been subjected to a preliminary examination at the hands of three or four members of the organization from which he sought employment, and then, thus far successful on the strength of his previous experience, he was received by a quiet gentleman who asked him half a dozen questions. The interview terminated abruptly. The Wildcat's questioner glanced at a report blank on the side desk before him and scribbled a memorandum on a printed form. He handed the note to the Wildcat. "Santa Fe No. 4, due out at 11:30 to-morrow. Get your outfit and report at our terminal office to-morrow morning."

The Wildcat batted his eyes. "Cap'n, suh, you means I is hired on?"

"I said so. On your way, and be a good boy."

"Yass-suh! Sho' will—and is dey any betteh boys, dey is gwine to be all fumbled up wid de angel wings whut's flappin' f'm dey shoulder-blades!"

In the corridor of the building, the Wildcat indulged himself in a brief shudder of congratulations. "Hot dam! Lady Luck sho' is booned me heavy. Grand job travellin' 'round an' 'round in de big towns takin' care of white folks—'cumulatin' me heavy tips every run—sniffin' de breeze an' drinkin' free ice wateh!"

He remembered his previous experience in the service. "Ain't no job for no field-hand. Boy got to know things to be a good porteh—got to know lots! 'Spect dey ain't no betteh job in de world. Eats reg'lar, sleeps mos' all de time, prancin' 'round in a grand uniform and grand white coats. Got to git me a uniform an' git it quick!"

At an establishment which catered to the trade, the Wildcat negotiated the purchase of his new outfit and then, finding new reason for exuberance in the tangible evidence of his luck, he marched proudly to the Little Dixie wherein his mascot goat was parked. He pranced into the entrance of the billiard parlor and exposed himself to the congratulations which were immediately forthcoming from the proprietor of the establishment. I'll say you sho' is a fast worker! You got a good run too—ain't no betteh train in de world! You sho' is settin' lucky 'count so many niggehs quittin' de service f'r de big wages in de oil fields. In de old days a boy wouldn't git no grand run like you is got widout workin' five years in de bad lands and ten mo' on some old tourist dawg house.

Heah you is ridin' high, runnin' a new battleship on de Limited. I'll say you is got de luck!"

"I'se got my mascot goat. Dat Lily brung mo' luck den I kin use. Got to go tell dat mascot 'bout de high money whut Lady Luck showered down." A mask of seriousness suddenly darkened the smiling countenance of the Little Dixie proprietor. "Whah at you gwine to stable dat goat whilst you makes yo' run?"

The Wildcat halted on his way to the back room where Lily was tethered. "Us parks dat goat right wid me! Ev'ry time me an' Lily gits lost f'm each otheh, Ol' Man Trouble steps in between wid a hard-luck battle dat like as not leaves me licked. Nawsuh! Whah at I goes an' whilst I'se rollin' high, Lily goes too an' breaks fifty-fifty wid me on de winnin's! Dat goat makes de run on de Limited widout no trouble —ain't I done brung Lily f'm N'Yawk to San Framcisco when I had dat run wid dem Blue Pheasant boys? Nawsuh! Lemme see dat goat whilst I 'splains dat if middlin' good luck is a minny, us is hooked a whale!"

The mascot exhibited no commensurate enthusiasm at the Wildcat's announcement of Lady Luck's favor, nor was Lily's Missouri pessimism diminished by the subsequent details of the program imposed by the Wildcat's new activity.

When the Wildcat climbed aboard his car at ten-thirty the next morning, an hour before No. 4 was due out, Lily suffered the inconvenience which is the common lot of contraband deadheads. Once aboard

the Pullman, the mascot's memory was excited by surroundings which had marked a previous transcontinental journey in an environment which had cramped her style. Forthwith her worst suspicions proved correct, for without ceremony, and intent upon the single object of getting his car dolled up before the first passengers should arrive, the Wildcat boosted the four-legged participant in Lady Luck's bounty into the narrow confines of the linen closet, where, after indulging in a gratifying butting attack on the low shelf above her, she subsided to an enraged bleating. To this vociferous remonstrance her master quickly responded.

The Wildcat carried a pint tin cup in his hand and the cup was filled with ice water. He opened the door of the linen closet and set the cup on the floor beside the goat. "Shut up dat bellerin' an' drown yo' nose in dis free ice wateh befo' I knocks you seven ways f'm yo' aroma. At ease, goat, an' does you rampage aroun' wid yo' appetite a-eatin' de sheets an' pillowcases like you done befo', enjoy yo'self heartily, because dat gwine to be yo' last meal heah below. Set pretty like a noble goat an' I 'cumulates some grand potato peelin's fo' yo' suppeh f'm de dinin'-car boys. See kin you konker yo' cravin' f'r sin befo' de devil gits you! Set pretty an' afteh while I comes back—got to 'range f'r my white folks now."

"Blaa-a!" Lily voiced an unenthusiastic promise to do the best she could, whereupon the Wildcat closed the door upon his mascot and resumed his professional duties.

Before his car was half filled with its patrons, he realized that here indeed was a job that promised cash returns far beyond his most extravagant hopes. He pocketed a five-dollar gift from a gentleman whose modest request was that the Wildcat do the best he could to insure the donor's comfort. "Sho' ain't no ten-cent folks so far," he exulted.

"Cap'n, yessuh! Sho' will! Aims to make you comfortable like you wuz in yo' own home!"

Two middle-aged ladies showered down a dollar apiece in return for the loan of two pillows, and two paper sacks for their hats. An elderly gentleman and his son paid a dollar and ten cents for advance information relative to the first call for lunch. The dollar came from the son.

When the train started, the Wildcat was bulging with high resolves. His wide smile was a sickle that seemed to reap sheaves of cash. "Best job in de world—us says so! Mo' dan ten dollahs, an' us ain't hardly turned a wheel. Twenty dollahs a day f'r ten days, dat's two hund'ed dollahs. Three times dat much ev'ry month—dat's six hund'ed dollahs. Pay-day folks, keep yo' wages! Us thrives widout no payroll long as dese white folks does dey duty!"

CHAPTER VII

IN the early afternoon the enthusiast sought the porter of the car ahead, and to this brunette individual he confided a brief sketch of the celebration in which he proposed to indulge when the end of his run should afford him opportunity. "Twenty dollahs a day, boy, sho' mounts up! Don't know whut I'se gwine to do wid my money 'ceptin' mebbe I eats me heavy an' boons my insides wid de best gin whut de elite bootleg folks kin provide. Lay oveh mebbe two days, den out again I goes!"

"You lays oveh one day," the old-timer corrected, "One day is all you gits—an' dey ain't much bootlaig gin whah you is goin'."

"Hush up! I knows dat Chicago town—nobody kin tell me dey runs short of likker in dat place! Las' time I comes through, dey wuz mo' drug sto's dan groceries and twice as many ramblin' bootleggers as dey wuz drug sto's."

The clamorous summons from the service bell gave the Wildcat's companion other things to think about, and so, alone, the gin-craver returned to his own car, where until late that night his contemplation of the delights which awaited him was interrupted only by the routine duties of his position.

At eleven o'clock, tired from the labors of the day,

but happy in the realization of the lake of luck in which he was swimming, he bestowed a final ration of potato peelings and a brimming cup of ice water upon his imprisoned mascot, and then when the day that had bulged with success began to dwindle into midnight he made up his bed on the long leather seat in the smoking-room and went to sleep.

He slept soundly, disturbed only by the phantom scenes of anticipated revelry. Toward morning, following a period of comparative quiet which had interrupted the normal travel noises of the train, the clanking and the rattle of trucks and rail joints resumed their monotonous rhythm and the sleeping protégé of Lady Luck sogged down three or four stages in the billowing slumber clouds about him.

Along around eight o'clock the sleeper blinked himself awake and fought himself clear of impertinent memories and gained a vantage point of consciousness from which he could survey the fair fields of reality. He congratulated himself on behalf of one and all, complimented Lady Luck on her good behavior, and drank deep of the free ice water which a benevolent corporation provides for those who enjoy it most.

He replenished the empty pint of ice water which the mascot goat had consumed during the night, and after a few confidential words of encouragement to Lily he returned to the smoking-room and made up the bed whereon he had slept. He paused now and then in his work to survey the interesting panorama of the adjacent country.

The train rounded a curve and the landscape-inspector noted to his surprise that no dining-car was included in its length. He began to be troubled about the question of breakfast, and then, confident that Lady Luck would provide the first essential to the day's fullness, he proceeded with his work until he was suddenly attracted to the ragged perimeter of a plateau whence the world seemed to fall away into space, as if some wedge of creation had been left out of the solid earth when the quitting-whistle blew on the evening of the Sixth Day.

His eyes widened with wonder at the scene before him. His vision was confused by the blur of pine trees on an intervening hill. "Lawd Gawd, de devil sho' clawed a noble gash in de land out beyond dem trees!" He got a second view of the Creator's unfinished business, when, miles away, below a drift of painted clouds, his vision swept the distant rim of the Grand Canyon.

His inspection was interrupted by the cinnamon-faced emperor of the next car who craved to borrow one cigarette. "One is all I kin use," the seeker protested when the Wildcat endeavored to donate half a package. "Ten minutes mo', an' I gits lots of time to lay in a supply."

"What you mean, lots of time? Don't you go travelin' away afteh no tobacco an' git left like I done once!"

The visiting porter looked at the Wildcat. "Does you know whah at you is?"

Wildcat hesitated. "Kain't say does I exact."

"Boy, I tells you! You lays oveh heah long 'nuff to git all de tobacco in de world did you have de price. Five minnits, an' you lands at de end of yo' run. Whah at you thinks you is gwine?

"I figgered us was headed f'r Chicago."

"You figgered wrong! Dis is a Canyon car. All yo' white folks gits out in five minutes mo'. Dey is headed f'r dis El Tovar Hotel up f'm de station. Git rustlin'! You is almost in."

The Wildcat got rustling. "How come dis Hell Too Far place? Ain't far 'nuff to give me time to brush down my white folks. Seems like de big man in Los Anxious told me something 'bout Grand Canyon, but I figgered he was alludin' to me an' dem big guns in de A.E.F. wah."

Before he had reaped half of the available gratuities which his customers were ready to bestow upon him, the train stopped and a hurried inspection showed the Wildcat that the stop marked their destination. Within five minutes all of the passengers had departed by the stairway leading from the station to the hotel.

Now, with the journey halted, the Wildcat's first objective was his mascot goat, and forthwith he hauled Lily out of her cramped quarters and led the unprotesting animal down the steps of the car. "Come 'long heah to dis lamp-post, Lily! I ties you so you don't do no ramblin' whilst I thrives up some breakfast f'r me an' you."

The Wildcat had no difficulty in trailing his companion porters to their breakfast rendezvous, and after he had finished he returned with a ration for Lily.

"Eat dese heah cold hot cakes whut Lady Luck boons you wid whilst I cleans up dis twelve-wheel battleship. You betteh behave yo'self, goat! De boys tells me us travels de run back to-morr' night, and 'les you walks pretty de chances is I loses you back in dat Los Anxious town next trip."

Lily rubbed her head against the Wildcat's knee in quick protest against the threatened sentence.

"Git away f'm me! Don't moult no goat feathers on dese blue pants, else I throws you into dis Grand Canyon so hard you bounces half-way back. Stay heah by de lamp-post whilst I does my work."

The Wildcat returned to his car and resumed his duties.

In Section 7, which had sheltered a late sleeper, reaching over to unhook the berth hammock the Wildcat's gaze swept the wide domain that stretched away to the distant horizon.

A moment only did he indulge in this idle survey. Three or four hundred feet away, trotting rapidly out of the picture, a goat around whose neck was the frayed ends of a clothes-line tether, won his instant and undivided attention. He grabbed for his cap and then, under his breath, he showered down a covey of whispered oaths calculated to singe the wool on any truant mascot.

The Wildcat swung down from his car and started across country in pursuit of the trotting goat. In an open forest of young pines he gained a hundred feet on his prey, but at the far edge of the timber, where the country afforded the goat a distinct view of her

pursuer, she accelerated her pace and widened the distance between herself and the Wildcat.

Now the Wildcat's ambition changed from a casual desire to catch Lily to a determined resolve to overtake the trotting animal even though the capture be the last act of a misspent life. "How come dat fool goat got de ramblin' crave so sudden? Lily neveh run away befo'—mebbe dat mascot done et somethin'!"

Ahead of him he flung a clatter of outdoor profanity which glanced harmlessly from the trotting goat.

After the first mile the country changed again from the clearing to an open wooded territory broken by little stretches of desert and scarred by eroded gullies of increasing depth.

At noon the chase had slowed to a three-mile walk, accelerated now and then, when the Wildcat's prey seemed almost within his grasp, to brief spurts of speed. These bursts of energy were duplicated by the wary four-legged leader of the chase until at noon the goat halted at a little spring long enough to quench a growing thirst and to nip a mouthful of succulent grass. Then, when the Wildcat came upon her, she resumed her march alone, while her thirsty pursuer indulged his pussonal craving for cold water refreshment.

At early evening the three-mile gait had slowed down to a languid prowl which afforded the Wildcat plenty of opportunity to realize the great fatigue which had settled upon him. His feet had begun to

hurt him early in the afternoon, but this discomfort had served only to intensify his dogged resolve to overtake the truant goat. Earlier in the afternoon the distance between the goat and her pursuer had narrowed to a feasible throwing-range and the Wildcat had reinforced his recurring outbursts of epithets with an occasional barrage of projectiles, a technical error, because it served only to increase the interval between pursuer and pursued.

Through the long afternoon the Wildcat had travelled with the sun at his back, and now suddenly he realized that the troubled day was fast drawing to a close. At this hour to the hunter there came a conviction of the utter futility of the chase. Footsore and weary, and suffering from a thirst which had burned steadily since mid-afternoon, he barked a final malediction toward the distant goat, and then in a changed and broken tone he creaked a fervent supplication to the absent goddess of his fortune. "Lady Luck, whah at is you? Rally 'round yo' sidetracked nigger whut done strayed f'm de fold. I'se A.W.O.L. a day's walk f'm whah I wuz, an' whah I is ain't no place. Rally 'roun' an' git me some place!"

The sidetracked son of the desert paused in his march to address his unseen protector. He looked about him as he mumbled his prayer to Lady Luck, and almost immediately he realized that his entreaty was not in vain, because in a narrow gully to his left, nestling intimately among the rock fragments which lined the sloping ground, he saw a little house whose

walls of stone, laid up in adobe mud, conveyed a message of hope almost as real as the structure before him.

He started toward the little house. His two-mile mope increased to a fast walk. "Hot dam! Whah dey is a house, de chances is dey is folks! Lady Luck sho' done some quick listenin'!"

When he was yet a hundred feet from the house, some quick intuition told him that it was deserted, but this disappointment was rendered negative by the sight of those things which at the moment he most desired. Arranged about a design drawn with red corn meal upon a cotton cloth that lay spread upon the ground before the house, were five earthenware dishes and five water jars.

Each of the earthenware dishes was piled high with a stack of thin cakes made of coarse corn meal, and each of the five water jars was more than half full of clear water.

The Wildcat sampled the first jar of water and, finding it as excellent as any drink he had ever tasted, he indulged himself in a preliminary quart. He reached for one of the corn cakes and bit into it. He found it delicious and real, and in a moment, drinking and feasting upon the repast which Lady Luck's bounty had provided, the cares of the day had faded even as the setting sun.

For a while, until half a dozen of the corn cakes had been consumed, he ate steadily, and then his banquet was interrupted by the realization of the lowered temperature that had come at the end of the

day. "Got me all het up walkin'. Now dat us is rested and rallied 'round dese heah rations, mebbe us betteh build a fire to keep warm wid."

He walked to a little pine tree which grew on the slope of the gully and returned a moment later carrying in his arms a cargo of broken branches and pitch-encrusted cones. He lighted a fire in front of his banquet board and when he had warmed himself he made a second journey to the source of fuel, returning with some larger limbs of the tree.

"Ain't no use trying to heat up de whole outdoors," he reflected. "I ain't seed such a grand stone house since us leaves de A.E.F. Wid a good fire goin' inside, plenty corn bread an' wateh, I guess mebbe Ol' Man Trouble retreats back to whah de devil keeps him penned up whilst Lady Luck is rallyin' 'roun'."

He selected an armful of small branches; carrying these and a cargo of larger limbs from the pine tree, he clawed a blazing torch from the cackling fire and walked through the low entrance of the little stone house.

At the portal, with the wavering flames of his torch illuminating the interior of the place, he halted and began a retreat which lasted until reason overcame the panic which his discovery of the interior decorations excited. "Huh! Dat ain't no voodoo! Nuthin' but a old scarecrow wid a feather vest. Ain't nuthin' but a old false-face dummy like whut chilluns scares you wid on Hollereens."

The scarecrow, standing against the wall with arms extended, was of wood, shaped in a rude representa-

tion of a human being. About the figure's waist was a colored kilt embellished with eagle feathers. From its pigmented face, rude crescent eyes incised in the wood leered down upon a necklace of knotted string embellished with alternate-colored pebbles and fragments of shells.

To the Wildcat had come a growing indifference toward the manikin. "Laff yo' head plumb off, old voodoo! The main thing us uses you fo' is to keep dis fire goin' in case I runs out of dis noble pitch wood. Does you behave yo'self, I leaves you standin' agin de wall and watch me eat some mo' of dat grand corn-pone whut Lady Luck booned me wid."

After his second attack upon the rations provided by the unknown agent of Lady Luck, the Wildcat curled himself up before the embers of the fire which burned on the earthen floor of the little stone house and set about enjoying his lodging for the night.

The image of the cresent-eyed face of the manikin against the wall, impotent while reason lightened the Wildcat's waking hours, persisted in some mirrored area of the sleeping Wildcat's subconsciousness. An hour or two before the dawn, the sleeper suffered his first trampling under the hoofs of a galloping night-mare. The steed of darkness was followed by a quick succession of its fellows. When the stampede was at its height, the Wildcat, writhing and moaning in his sleep, was tortured with visions of galloping goats and giant painted dolls who hurled him, time and again, over the edge of an abyss from whose elastic floor, carpeted with corn cakes bigger than bass drums, he

rebounded higher each succeeding time, until from a slippery perch on the thin edge of a cloud he saw below him the illimitable reaches of the Grand Canyon.

At dawn, when these phantoms of the night should have faded in the light of day, to the Wildcat, half awakened by the chill of the hour, came the vague realization that the manikin which had stood against the wall had changed position and had become possessed of life, for now, framed in the lighted doorway of the house, gesticulating wildly and yelling uncanny syllables of the witches' code, danced the painted figure of the active demon. His head-dress and necklaces clinked in time with the tinkle of a bandoleer of shells which lay across his chest. Anklets of netted rope, plaited moccasins of colored rushes, armlets of silver and a gaudy woven kilt completed the vivid costume to whose wearer life had returned in the night.

In ten seconds, fully awake now, and relying implicitly on the one antidote for localized disturbances, the Wildcat galloped past the snarling dancer and tore up the steep bank of the ravine at a pace compared to which the average cyclone was but the gentle airs of a summer morning.

Now, in pursuit, the demon of the dawn accelerated the Wildcat's gait with a series of bloodcurdling yells.

The Wildcat leaned heavily on supplication and breathed a quick prayer to Lady Luck. "Lawd Gawd, whah at is you, Lady Luck? Dem corn cakes

wuz nuthin' but dat devil's bait! Heah I is on de barb hook an' headed f'r hell! I'se a lost niggeh 'less you heads me 'round whilst my hind laigs is still agile. Kain't outrun no devil!"

In spite of his statement to Lady Luck concerning his running abilities, the Wildcat managed to widen the distance between himself and his pursuer, until he slacked up his killing pace in a sudden burst of confidence inspired by the sight of a group of buildings clustered at the base of a rocky butte which lifted from the level country surrounding the theatre of his predicament.

Straight for these buildings, running now with the voodoo devil a hundred feet behind him, confident that defense against the pursuing fiend would come from the human occupants of the building, the Wildcat galloped the last length of the way to life and liberty.

To his ears, when he had fairly gained the shadow of the first outlying structure, came the sweet consolation of human voices intoning the soothing measures of a hymn.

An exclamation of gratitude welled from the fugitive's heart. "Praise de Lawd! I'se found some folks whut's revivalin' themselves wid a camp-meetin'!"

He slackened his pace to something slower than that of an overdue jack-rabbit. "Don't aim to bust up no camp-meetin'!" All that he aimed to do at that moment was to retain enough momentum to take him to the mourners' bench.

He rounded the corner of the building in time to realize that his aim was bad.

In spite of the emergency application of non-skid technique which governed his galloping hind legs, his momentum was sufficient to carry him through a collision shared by one of the participating members of the singing band and to land him between two crow-hopping lines of celebrants adorned with costumes more picturesque and terrifying than that worn by his pursuer.

The chant of the dancing crew changed its tempo and lifted in a series of wild yells almost as fervent as the Wildcat's regret at having backslid from the country of his youth where salvation was free.

At the moment he felt that he needed salvation and lots of it, and this statement was the theme of his announcement to the unseen goddess of his fortunes.

"Lady Luck, betteh come an' git me befo' I'se got by dese voodoo folks. . . . Lawd gosh, git away, snakes!"

With his brake-shoes screeching on a red-hot rail, he detoured around a small shelter of cottonwood boughs, under which, writhing actively under the gentle blows of an eagle-feather whip wielded by a snake-herder, there appeared to be all the rattlers and bull snakes in the world.

Halted now, the Wildcat cast a supplicating look at the two lines of decorated dancers swarming about him, but here he found nothing of comfort, for as an added touch of horror some of these church folks were festooned with live snakes which dangled from their mouths.

CHAPTER VIII

THIS was the Wildcat's zero hour, and even as he realized that he was Ol' Man Trouble's twin and fell howling to the ground, he shielded his eyes with his arms to shut out the vision of a dozen snake-bearing figures which leaped toward him.

In seventy seconds, which seemed as many years to Lady Luck's maudlin orphan, he was rudely removed from the scene by four carriers. Unable to do aught except yell at the top of his lungs and sag down until he scraped the ground, he was dragged through the doorway of a small building made of rock and mud.

A heavy door of poles lashed with rawhide closed between the Wildcat and what he had mistaken for a revival-meeting.

In this temporary sanctuary the ravelled threads of reason were spliced in time to induce a more acute terror of anticipation.

On the dancing-field the painted figures resumed their program and presently the low chanting, timed to the crow-hopping movement of the dance, had become a chorus of howls that served to confirm the Wildcat's conviction of disaster. Each of the dancing figures broke from the line of his fellows and gyrated

to the snake reservoir whence, escorted by two snakeless members of his kind, he traveled the track of horror between the two ranks of participating howlers.

The Wildcat shut his eyes against the scene and kept them shut until a cessation in the clamor gave him courage to open them.

In the central space he saw the snakes thrown together on a carpet of corn meal which had been cast upon the ground, and then from the scrambling herd of painted demons single figures emerged, bearing the snake prize which they had won from the writhing aggregation of the reptiles.

Convinced now that the rites which he witnessed were preliminary to some final ceremony which would cost him lots of life, liberty and personal blood, the hopeless victim of events resigned to the clutching demons of despair and lay inert upon the earthen floor of his prison.

He closed his eyes and indulged himself in a three-minute retrospection.

He included a whispered recital of his craving for revenge: "Wuz us headed f'r heaven 'stead of hell, de fust thing us craves would be dat penned-up Lily varmint an' a oak barrel stave. Whilst I had de strength I sho' would unravel dat mascot goat till dey wasn't 'nuff left to bait a minny hook!"

For a little while he prowled in the sweet fields of Eden enjoying a revengeful mood whose intensity erased from his mind some of the sharper details inspired by his predicament. Then, abruptly, the cloak of despair was once more whirled about his cowering

form when the sun-drenched skies were darkened with lowering clouds as black as his immediate future.

Green lightning speared the horizon.

A silence which had fallen over the revival-meeting was shattered by a tremendous crash of thunder.

Alternating then, lighting their victim's canvas of life and battering his soul with the gnarled bludgeon of sonorous fulminations, the impassioned deities of lightning and thunder staged their terrific show.

The loosed flood of the resultant cloudburst came as a curtain to the rain god's drama.

In the furious waters which launched from the darkened skies, standing bedraggled in the arena which had so lately been the scene of their wild rites, from his confining cell the Wildcat saw a dozen of the decorated dancers segmented in the circle of a conference whose fervor left them unmindful of the flooding rain. While he observed the group, it seemed to him that various figures pointed at times toward the Wildcat's prison, and then, to an accompaniment of nodding heads which suggested an agreement on some mutual project, the group started toward the Wildcat's place of confinement.

This was the moment when the dancing devils would wreak their vengeance upon Lady Luck's orphan. "Chances is dem boys aims to barbecue me! I ain't done nuthin' but befo' dey gits me I aims to!"

In desperation he looked about him for a weapon. His search was interrupted by the opening door, and, once more struggling in the clutches of half a dozen captors, the Wildcat was shifted around from where

he was to some place else from which Lady Luck was A.W.O.L. a million miles.

Hauled forth from his prison into the pouring rain, trembling more violently than the thunder-shaken earth, the victim of events was hauled through the doorway of a larger building.

From the group of his captors one member stepped forth and spoke quietly to the assemblage. The speaker's words, delivered in an even tone, were gibberish to the captive Wildcat, but from their modulated measures Old Man Trouble's twin derived his first faint spark of hope. "Mebbe dey ain't gwine to eat me! Mebbe all dey does is hang me! Sho' be glad to git hanged. Seems like gittin' shot wid a good gun would be de bes' thing what could happen right now! Don't care whut dey does long as dey keeps dat pile of snakes out of my life."

At the moment heaven had nothing so tempting to offer the Wildcat as a good and substantial county jail. "Wished I had 'cumulated me a good lifelong sentence in de pen'tentiary when I wuz a boy! All I'd ask wuz furlough 'nuff to drag out and bust dat Lily into hamburger goat!"

His reverie of desire was interrupted by the speaker who had addressed the quiet audience. That individual reached deeply into a buckskin pouch and withdrew his hand. In his grasp were three silver rings and two heavy bracelets of the same metal, set thickly with stones as blue as the skies had been before the thunder-storm. The speaker held this jewelry up so that all of his auditors might see, and from the assem-

blage came the vociferous expressions of approval. He turned to the Wildcat and, speaking in serviceable English, he delivered a presentation speech excellent for its brevity.

"Walpi, Mishong, Oribi, Snake people, Antelope people, all dance for rain. Eight day rain gods tell my people no. Rattlesnakes in *kesi* no good. Priest in *kiva* no make rain. You come. Black cloud face bring rain. Rain make corn. Now everybody eat!"

The speaker extended the rings and the bracelets with a quick gesture.

The Wildcat jumped back. "Git 'way, boy! Everybody ain't gwine to eat me! Befo' dey is enny barbecuin' starts, I aims to mingle whah de fightin' is thickest. Nobody's gwine to tame me into no tenderloin banquet. I'se tough bull meat and I aims to beller. Go 'long, boy!"

The gift-bearer, sensing the Wildcat's lack of understanding, tried different tactics. "We like you——" he began.

"Mebbe you prefers me boiled wid potatoes," the Wildcat interrupted, "but, boy, you is lucky to git jack-rabbit and corn bread."

The gift-bearer ignored the Wildcat's interruption. "We like you," he continued. "You bring rain. We give you present. Good ring. Good bracelet." He removed the gaudy blanket from around his shoulders and laid it at the Wildcat's feet. "Chief's blanket! When rain stop, you ride mule to railroad. You work railroad. I know your railroad coat with silver but-

tons. We like you. You bring rain. We good friend to cloud face."

The speaker held out his hand to the Wildcat. The word "friend" put a different definition on the verb of admiration. Liking folks was all right as long as the cannibalistic intent was absent. The Wildcat accepted the turquoise rings and bracelets and then in a sudden confidence in his luck he shook hands with his new friend. "Sho' us is friends," he conceded. "Right now is when a boy needs a friend. You means dat yaller an' bull-blood blanket is f'r me?"

"Good friend—your present."

The Wildcat shook hands again and this time violence marked the fervor of his relief. "Hot dam, old paint face! Us tells de world us is friends! Sho' is a noble blanket! Us thanks you each an' all fo' it an' fo' de jewelry. Always did like blue-rock rings —blue an' red! I sees de rain is slackin' up. Whut wuz dat you sez 'bout ridin' me back to de railroad on a mule?"

The reply to the Wildcat's question was delivered in deeds instead of words. Five minutes later, escorted by two smiling guides, travelling under sunlit skies which now were emptied of their lashing waters, the Wildcat began his return to the railroad terminal at the Grand Canyon, from which he had been lured by the fleeting goat.

Setting pretty under the colored mantle of rank which he wore about his shoulders, the Wildcat urged

his flop-eared mount to a jog which taxed the ability of the guides trotting along in front of him.

As a result of his impatient gait his goal was reached in the late afternoon of the eventful day.

He wasted no time in speaking the ceremony of farewell to his guides. "I'se much obliged to you boys an' does you eveh git to Memphis, Tenn-o-see—whah I aims to locate f'm now on—I shows you 'round. Dis land is built big, but does I neveh leave de railroad again, de chances is us ain't gwine to complain above a whisper. So long—but does you come to Memphis, put yo' pants on befo' de police gits you!"

On a sidetrack, due out at 7:45 P.M., the Wildcat found his deserted car, and now, except for his longing for an opportunity to chastise and forgive his truant mascot goat, his cup of happiness included no space for discontent nor apprehension.

"De chances is dat poor li'l ramblin' Lily is lost permanent out whah de jack-rabbits gits so lonesome dey 'filiates wid hoot-owls. Poor li'l Lily! I takes back whut I says about beatin' dat goat to fragments. Don't see how kin I thrive none 'less I travels wid dat li'l goat! Seems kinda lonely in dis old car—seems kinda lonely whaheveh I goes widout Lily."

The melancholy inspired by the fate of his mascot gave place to a mood of utter forgiveness for all of Lily's past offenses, and then, midway of a mumbled recital of his errors of impetuous judgment, he was interrupted by a faint bleat which came from the direction of the station platform where he had parked the goat on the previous morning.

Suddenly rigid, listening until his ears fairly quivered, again he heard Lily's voice!

The mascot's call galvanized her master into instant activity. He raced down the length of the aisle and leaped to the ground. He galloped around the end of his car and shaped a course for the spot where Lily had been hitched.

To his eager eyes Lady Luck revealed the answer to his supplication. Nibbling delicately on the wooden lamp-post to which she had been tied throughout the night, Lily had waited patiently through all the dragging hours until the moment should come when her master might see fit to shower down the delayed blessings of food and drink.

"Hot dam, goat! Me an' Lady Luck meets you wid a brass band! I done you wrong! Yo' doggone twin like to led me plumb to hell. Goat, how is you? Come 'long heah wid yo' old Wildcat whilst us 'cumulates de best rations whut money kin buy f'r yo' pussonal insides."

"Blaa-a!" The warmth of Lily's greeting included some added tenor of gratitude for the prospect of a square meal.

The Wildcat understood his mascot's language. "Me an' you both!" he affirmed. "Me an' you both —'ceptin' I'se twice as glad to be heah as you is to see me. An' leave me tell you one thing—does you eveh fool me again, lookin' like yo' p'odigal twin, I aims to knock you nine miles f'm nach'ral. Double-time dem laigs till us 'cumulates yo' banquet!"

CHAPTER IX

ADORNED with a shadbelly cutaway coat whose lustre had been dimmed in spots by misdirected splashes of gin and vittles during the prosperous hours of a lay-over celebration, the Wildcat, towing his mascot goat, marched toward the porters' room in Union Station at Los Angeles.

On the end of her tow-rope Lily hung back with a fatigue inspired by a full week of what had seemed senseless prowling. The Wildcat jerked at Lily's leading-string with an expression of impatience. "Come 'long, mutton chop, befo' you gits garnished wid a tombstone. All de time laggin' an' draggin' back! Fust thing you knows, us misses de Limited."

In the porters' room the Wildcat removed the shadbelly coat and revealed the buttoned blouse of his official uniform. He took off this blouse and after pinning up the long tails of the shadbelly coat he got into the unofficial garment and then above it he replaced the blouse with the shining nickel buttons. When the transformation was accomplished, a companion porter addressed a languid question to the Wildcat. "Whut run you got, boy?"

"I'se due out on Numbeh 4. I'se runnin' de Canyon car on de Limited."

His professional companion looked at the Wildcat

and then at the clock on the wall of the porters' room. "Chances is you aims to show some speed f'm now on."

"How come?"

The critic's gaze returned to the clock. "De Limited ain't changed no habits lately. It still got de 11:30 leavin' habit. You sho' must feel agile to give dat train a twenty-minnit start on you. Almos' twelve o'clock now. You' train is almost as far f'm here as you is f'm a job."

The Wildcat's jaw moved up and down four times before his speech became articulate. "You means de Limited done left?"

"Dat's whut I means. You is high an' dry like a church ceilin'. You betteh git leavin' too befo' de inspector sees you. Dat boy feels rough an' de chances is, does he see you, you overtakes yo' train on foot wid speed to spare."

The Wildcat was prompt to accept his companion's advice. He switched his costume again to where the unofficial shadbelly coat was once more on the outside, and with Lily dragging along as usual he retreated from the scene of this latest disaster with which Ol' Man Trouble had pestered him.

"Some folks learns by tryin'
An' some from hearin' tell;
Dey ain't no use a-cryin',
But, Lawdy, ain't it hell!"

Answering an instinct borne of long campaigns on life's battlefields, he headed direct for a lunch counter whose motto was quantity and lots of it.

After an hour's battle at the lunch counter, gorged to the gills with an assorted ration which stretched the fabric of the shadbelly coat, the victim of time's implacable march warmed to the first benevolent reactions of his old philosophy. "All us loses, Lily, is whut some otheh boy found. Heah us is, eatin' heavy, whilst de otheh boy contributes de sweat. 'While back us wuz moanin' wid grief. Kain't see no grief now. Otheh boy has de work whilst us has one mo' holiday. Come 'long heah whilst us 'vestigates whah at is Lady Luck. Kain't see me no pussonal trouble. Mebbe it ain't so much whut you sees as how you looks at it."

The Wildcat began his retreat from the theatre of industry. Half an hour later, at a clothing store which specialized in second-hand uniforms, he stopped long enough to trade the porter's blouse with its bright buttons for a five-dollar bill. Thereafter, adorned with the shadbelly cutaway coat and wearing the blue pants which had seen too much sitting-down service to be salable, he continued his flight from Los Angeles.

In the open country, away from the city, he answered some wild bird instinct within him and headed north a month or two in advance of the early spring.

Within a week the tension of march had relaxed until now the Wildcat's progress became an aimless succession of minor adventures linking the vagrant's yesterday and to-morrow with the casual checkered hours of his present day. Throughout the month, neglected alike by Lady Luck and Old Man Trouble, he suffered the lot of a neutral on life's battlefield, and

then, tramping north through the benevolent empire of the Western coast, he realized one morning that the long line of breakers before him was pounding the beach which fronts Golden Gate Park in San Francisco.

In the warm sands in the lee of a sea-wall near the life-saving station, with Lily beside him, he lay for a while contemplating the breaking blue margin of the Pacific, the gray horizon, the soaring flight of a hundred gulls, and an interesting strip of his personal future.

"Us is loafed too long now, Lily. Seems like Lady Luck done fo'got my name. I craves me a three-time ration instead of dis now-an'-den nutriment what lazy folks gits. Dis is de best town in de world when you has a job. Us locates a job of work so as to git along till dat Lady Luck woman gits back."

On the instant of his resolve, Lady Luck started back toward the Wildcat, but for several subsequent days the protégé of the goddess of fortune remained unaware of his divinity's renewed attention.

Any job-hunter, coasting the semicircle of the San Francisco shore-line from the beach at Golden Gate Park to Mission Rock on the other side of the city, will be confronted by various opportunities wherein he can trade his labor for money enough to get along on.

The Wildcat craved to get along, and midway of his journey around the edge of the city he encountered a job which seemed to offer exceptional opportunities for a worker equipped with an appreciation of food and drink.

The Wildcat's job met him at Fisherman's Wharf.

"You means I gits all de fish I kin eat, all de red wine I kin drink, all de boat-ridin' I kin do, an' five dollahs a day fo' helpin' you fish?"

The Italian operator of the fishing-boat confirmed the Wildcat's summary of the rewards incidental to the life of a fishing-captain's lieutenant. "All the fish you can eat, all the wine you can drink, all the work you can do," the Italian confirmed. "The life —not so bad. The money—five dollar a day." He subjected the Wildcat to a sudden inspection whose intensity burned its victim with all of the sting of a popping blacksnake whip. The inspector's eyes narrowed. "And maybe, if you are faithful, there will be other rewards."

"You means I gits extry money fo' ketchin' mo' fish den you expects?"

"Extra money for catching fish in bottles. From the north comes the whiskey ships. Their cargo is gold. If you are faithful, some of it may be yours. If you are not faithful——" The Italian sliced his fingers across his throat.

The Wildcat shivered with comprehension. "I knows yo' meanin'. My name begins wid faithful an' stops wid twice dat much. Whah at is dis fish work?"

An hour later, wearing a suit of flapping oilskins, the Wildcat began his return journey toward the Golden Gate, but this time he traveled in one of a fleet of fishing-boats that headed for the open sea. At Mile Rocks seasickness claimed him, and until the boat reached the fishing-grounds, eight miles out, the new

hand endured a fate that looked twice as black as his complexion had been before it turned a sickly sea-green.

With his recovery he engaged with deepening interest in the capture of half enough fish to sink the craft wherein he rode, and then, when his companion sighted a red-painted spar buoy a thousand feet away, he gained the rudiments of his first lesson in open-sea bootlegging.

Slung on a rope lashed to the floating spar was a wheat sack and in the wheat sack, padded and packed in their protective sheathing of oakum, were six full quarts of Canadian-Scotch whiskey.

Before nightfall the pair had picked up five more prizes. "Three dozen bottle," the Italian summarized when they were homeward-bound. "It means more as two hundred dollar profit for me. Black man, you make five dollar wages and I have make fifty times that much. It is a good day for da boss."

"Sho' looks like a good day to me," the Wildcat returned. "All de fish I kin eat, all de likker I kin drink, an' five dollahs cash." He turned to his mascot goat who was crouched near the coughing auxiliary engine. "Hot dam, Lily! I says Lady Luck is found us. Us is ridin' high on de gold ocean. Scoop down a bucket an' dip yo'self a million dollahs' wuth of luck befo' de luck ocean dries up."

Lily, engaged in munching a gratifying salad of seaweed, replied to the Wildcat with a bleat which served to express her satisfaction with her participation in the fisherman's life on the rolling wave.

For a week, eating heavy and drinking deep, drawing five dollars a day and seeing lots of new life, no suggestion of the unfair division of the profits entered the Wildcat's mind.

The mascot goat, enjoying a more varied menu than she had known, drifted rapidly into a belief that here, at last, on land and sea, she occupied the royal suite in a heaven reserved for good goats.

The Italian boat-operator, bootlegging his way into a limousine life, was content with the drift of events, save that now and then he knew the anguish of that great ambition which comes with the first minor increment of great wealth.

Within the month a desire to make big money, and to make it quick, impelled the small-business bootlegger to draw cards in a broad-gauge syndicate involving profits to be counted in thousands of dollars instead of the smaller sums which had rewarded his illicit activities.

With two of his countrymen he journeyed to Seattle, where, after a series of conferences with the wholesalers operating out of the North, he became party to a whale of a project which promised to flood half of thirsty San Francisco with imported hooch.

While the Italian boat-owner was away from his field of activity, the Wildcat, tagging along single-handed at the heels of the fishing-fleet, navigated his boat and day by day caught enough fish to make expenses.

During the first few days of his work, loneliness occasionally overtook him, but when his industry had

settled into a routine which gave him opportunity to look around him, his hours at sea were crowded with too many interesting things to permit him to be lonely.

On a day which started under a grey fog and which later brightened until the lone fisherman and his mascot were drifting on a choppy sea which glittered under a noonday sun, came the whale.

The Wildcat had seen submarines and destroyers, cargo tramps, square-rigged ships and passenger liners, but with the lifting fog, a mile away across the surface of the sea, he sighted a floating mass which quickened his fish-hunting instinct as soon as he had solved the mystery of identity.

"Fish is fish, Lily. Beginnin' wid a minny an' endin' wid a whale, fish is fish," he announced to his mascot. "Does us git five dollahs fo' ketchin' a load of dese heah halibrutes, de chances is whale fish is wuth a hund'ed dollahs. Looks like fish meat 'nuff to feed de town a week. Kain't use no bait hook on dat big boy. Us gits him wid somethin' dat won't leave go."

"Blaa-a!" Lily agreed to everything.

"Hush yo' mouth whilst us 'cumulates dat ol' whale fish!"

The Wildcat busied himself with the business of retrieving the drifting fishing-gear, and when it was stowed away he tied a long hand-line on the shaft of a pike pole and laid this improvised harpoon along the narrow forward deck of his fishing-boat.

In the distance, the whale, undisturbed by a dozen protesting gulls which were circling above him, floated

high in the flooding sunlight which had replaced the lifting fogs.

The Wildcat started the boat's engine and a moment later, with the exhaust coughing its harsh and whale-scaring note at the water-line, the craft swung about and headed in the direction of the whale-hunter's prey.

"Chances is dat varmint is restin' himself f'm a hard night's swimmin'. Us sneaks up f'm behind him an' stobs him in de tail wid dis pike pole. Den de ruckus begins! Ol' whale fish whirls 'round to see who us is an' den I bats him in de head wid dis ax!"

Within a hundred feet of his victim, the Wildcat began to doubt the efficiency of his ax, but now, quivering before the crisis of the chase, no thought of retreat stayed him.

He headed the boat for the whale's tail.

While the boat was yet thirty feet from contact with the inert monster, the Wildcat shut off the boat's engine. He clambered to the bow deck and picked up his pike pole harpoon from which trailed the hand-line. Bracing himself before the instant of collision, he rammed the steel-pointed shaft into the whale's tail.

It was then that the harpooner realized that the whale was considerably larger than it had looked.

Under the impulse of the Wildcat's terrific effort, the harpoon buried itself a full three feet in the tissues of the whale's tail. The Wildcat leaped back and grabbed his ax, a little doubtful of his ability to strike the killing blow and yet resolved to go through

with the attack as far as conquest or defeat, now that it had begun.

With the ax swinging easily in hand, the Wildcat waited for a whale's dance of death to bring the bulk of his head within striking-distance.

The whale failed to respond.

Lily, standing out prominent on the bow deck of the little fishing-boat, wrinkled her nose in a sudden criticism of an aroma which pervaded the atmosphere of the battle-sea. An instant later the Wildcat reacted to the effluvia. "Mebbe de whale is sick." He looked at his mascot goat. On Lily's face was the semblance of a sneer. "Whut you mean laffin' at a poor whale? Dat varmint don't smell half so bad as whut you did befo' you got deodorized."

"Blaa-a!" Lily laughed a goat laugh at the master of the whaling-ship.

"Shut yo' mouth! Whut you mean sneerin'? Whut if dis whale hez gone 'way f'm life heah below? Ain't no time fo' a measly goat to laff. By rights whut you ought to do is take off yo' hat, an' pray. Git out of my way befo' I uses dis ax on you!"

The Wildcat made a threatening gesture toward the mascot goat and it carried the dignity of a promise.

Lily retreated in sudden fear.

She trotted three steps across the deck of the little fishing-boat and leaped wildly aboard the whale's tail. She stood for a moment with one foot braced against the wooden shaft of the harpoon which stuck up out of the victim's propelling-gear and then, seeking a more stable footing, she climbed up the slop-

ing area of the whale until she had gained the comparatively level expanse near the floater's equator.

The Wildcat, forgetting his whale fish in a new ambition to retrieve his truant mascot, abandoned the problem of dragging the pike pole out of his mammoth trophy. With a threatening gesture of his ax, he leaped on board the whale in pursuit of Lily.

The mascot goat looked back for an instant over her shoulder and took three or four quick steps forward. Then, to the Wildcat's amazement, Lily bleated one despairing bleat and disappeared suddenly into a void for which the Wildcat found no explanation until he had gained a vantage point on the hurricane-deck of the mysterious monster.

Here, looking down in a well, eight feet square, which had been excavated out of the whale, the Wildcat saw Lily splashing around in two feet of sea water. "Goat, you doggone fool," he called out, "how come you stumbles into de whale's basement?" He waved the ax at Lily. "Git 'long up heah befo' I gits down here wid you."

Lily looked up and on her face was a supplication.

The Wildcat relented. "I 'spect you craves to come up, but kain't." He looked at the steep side of the well. "Wait whilst I gits me a rope."

The Wildcat slid down the slippery deck of his rolling captive. He checked his career against the pike pole and began hauling in on the hand-line which stretched from his weapon to the fishing-boat.

The boat had drifted twenty feet away from the

whale's side and the Wildcat hauled in on the hand-line, seeking to drag the boat nearer to him.

With the first pull on the line, the boat's engine coughed once. The Wildcat disregarded the warning and hauled heavily on the line, and then it was that a quick succession of exhausts told the marooned fisherman that the tangled rope had led round the fly-wheel and across the throttle of the gasoline line.

Running light, the craft headed away from the whale and the whale's boarding party at a ten-mile rate.

A realization of his predicament came to the Wildcat. "Lawd Gawd, Lady Luck! Heah us is lonely an' driftin' on dis Jonah fish!"

CHAPTER X

I

WHEN the drifting Wildcat got over his realization ceremony, he hauled in on the line which had come over the side from the truant craft. With the hand-line he retrieved a snarl of fish-hooks and cordage together with a landing-gaff.

He stored this gear against the pike-pole harpoon and then, giving only a moment to his new problem, he resumed his original campaign of rescue.

Over the coping of the whale's basement he fished awhile for his mascot. Lily failed to rise to the bait. The Wildcat knotted a loop in the end of the hand-line and attempted to snare the mascot. He failed in this and then, on his knees, leaning over the edge of the cavity cut in the whale, he swung his lasso at Lily on one final attempt at roping his four-legged companion.

Lily ducked her head and bleated her objections, and an echo of her bleating was the Wildcat's startled cry at the discovery that he had overreached himself. His knees slipped over the slick edge of the whale's basement.

His flight ended with his floundering in two feet of

water which slushed around in the hold of the whale.

The Wildcat stood up, intent now on the single business of capturing the cause of his troubles and administering a well-deserved chastisement.

Erect now and with the whale's bilge-water around his knees, the Wildcat started after Lily, only to be checked in his campaign of retribution by a sudden realization that here, in a fish fabric that should have been meat and bones, was a substantial floor of wood.

He paused for a moment and looked at Lily. "Lawd Gawd, goat, how come all dis solid pavement inside dis Jonah fish?"

He plunged his hand under the waters about him and his fingers contacted with the smooth surface of pine planks. "Huh! Dis sho' beats me! I neveh knew whale fish was 'quipped wid wood floors just like a house."

The Wildcat got busy with the mystery of the wooden pavement in the whale's basement.

He felt around beneath the water surface. "Mebbe us kin find de hasp an' staple on a trap-door an' git down into some cellah whah it's dry. Neveh kin tell about dese Jonah fish. Seems like dey is built queer."

His exploring fingers found a crevice in the wood pavement and a moment later he managed to get his hand down to the under side of a heavy box. He hauled on the box and stood upright with his cargo. "Huh! Looks some like likker," he said to the mascot goat, who was enjoying a gratifying bath.

With the heavy heel of one of his discarded shoes, he hammered a corner of the top from the box and an

instant later his hopes were confirmed. "Case goods, Lily! Hot dam, us is hit a gold mine."

He got one of the bottles out of the box and cracked the neck off it with a well-aimed blow of his ax.

A twelve-inch drink, the diameter of his throat, gurgled its way downward to where it could do a lot of good. "Whuff! Dat sho' is noble likker! Mebbe dis whale ain't got no prize aroma, but nobody kin say nuthin' about de likker whut dis Jonah fish carries. Sho' noble likker. Comes right when us needs it mos'. Needs all my strength to git dis ol' whale baled out so he won't sink."

The Wildcat began needing his strength for drinking and baling purposes when the sun was midway of the heavens. He used his strength and his battered hat to such good advantage that within an hour the whale's basement was comparatively dry.

The floor of the basement was made up of mosaic of bottled goods in cases and on this bed of ease, reclining intimately against the whale's inner nature, ornamenting his oration with right-handed gestures, at one o'clock the Wildcat explained their predicament to his mascot goat. "Heah us is, wid fish-lines an' bait-hooks." He stood erect and made an inspection of the horizon. "De ol' fish-boat is too far gone to ketch by swimmin'. Dis heah whale is 'quipped wid fish-bait an' likker. Goat, whut mo' does you want?"

"Blaa-a!" In Lily's reply was a something which suggested the fate which awaited the Wildcat when his Italian employer should overtake him.

"Goat, you is mistook. Us ain't gwine back.

Chances is did dat fish-man ketch me now, wid de boat lost an' no fish caught 'ceptin' dis pussonal whale fish whut belongs to me, de boy might r'ar back in his rage an' barbecue me loose f'm my health an' strength. Like as not, he wouldn't see de right an' wrong of whut us done. Like I told you befo', it ain't so much whut you sees as how you looks at it. Naw-suh, goat, us is sailors f'm now on, an' wid dat fish-boy ragin' in San Framcisco us heads de otheh way. Might as well git goin' whilst de goin' is good. . . . Whut fo' is dis ol' whale's tail so us kin use dese oilskin clo'es fo' sailin' purposes so de breeze kin blow us 'way f'm whah at dat ragin' fish-boy is? Answer me, goat!"

Lily's answer seemed to confirm the Wildcat's belief in his own scheme, and forthwith the whale sailor retrieved the long pike pole, and after he had pointed it with his ax he rammed it deep in a vertical position into the highest point of the whale's forward deck. He drove a stake, made from a section of the cover of a whisky case, into the whale's back a few feet from where his improvised mast had been stepped. Between the masthead and this stake he rigged a short length of his hand-line, and from this line, using half a dozen barb hooks from the tangle of gear which had come overboard from the fishing-boat on the end of the hand-line, he rigged his oilskin coat as a makeshift sail.

Against the edge of the ax he slit the legs of his oilskin pants, and in a little while the sail area was augmented by the full expanse of these subequatorial oilskins.

Another section of hand-line, rigged to the upstanding flipper of the whale's tail, served as a jerk-line tiller rope.

When this was done, the mast, bending low under the stress of its straining gear and the breeze that filled the sails, was righted and stayed with three light guys which the Wildcat made fast to a trio of whiskey-case pegs driven into the whale's deck.

With his motive power established, the navigating officer drank the last heavy slug of hooch from his bottle and leaned back with a deep sigh of satisfaction. "Heah us is, Lily, sailin' south. Plenty fo' drink, middlin' warm, an' a long ways to go."

He threw a fragment of wood overboard and checked the progress of his craft. "Us is travelin' as fast as a man kin walk. Chances is us lands somewhah sometime. Just now de main thing is suppeh."

The Wildcat baited a hook with a fragment of whale meat and trailed a twenty-foot fish-line over the side. A six-pound fish answered his invitation almost immediately. He hauled the fish on board. "Hot dam, Lily—look at dis heah halibrute whut Lady Luck sent fo' nutrifyin' purposes. Us ain't got no mo' troubles dan dis heah whale—only us knows it an' he don't."

He fumbled around in his pocket and produced a waterproof shotgun shell matchbox. He chopped half a dozen slivers from a wet piece of pine which he broke from the top of a whiskey case and in a moment, on an insulating-rug of whaleskin which he spread in the whale's basement, he had fire over which within

ten minutes the halibut had been sufficiently cooked to enable a hungry sailor to dull the edge of his appetite.

"Now did us have a five-cent seegar, I'd leave de proud world drift by! As is, de best us kin do is one mo' gratifyin' slug of likker followed by a hearty bite at dis heah eatin'-tobacco."

The Wildcat acted on his own program. He broached the second bottle from the open whiskey case and with his after-dinner likker he indulged himself with a mouthful of eating-tobacco.

Thereafter, sailing south, into the clutches of whatever reception committee Lady Luck might have at some unknown rendezvous, he sat pretty and talked politics at his mascot goat.

At midnight, forty miles south of his noon position, about all that was required to complete the perfection of the situation was a gallon of drinking-water, and this was supplied by the bountiful Lady Luck in the form of a gust of rain which condensed from the midnight fogs and which made of the oilskin sails a watershed from which ran twice as much drinking-water as a thirsty southbound sailor could consume.

Bulging with food and drink, asking no questions of the future, the Wildcat addressed his mascot goat just before both of them went to sleep. "Eat all dat seaweed you craves, goat—den git yo'self rested. I eats when I kin git it, I sleeps mos' all de time, I don't give a doggone if de sun don't neveh shine."

"Blaa-a!" Lily made it unanimous.

"Dat's me!" the Wildcat returned. "Yestiddy is

gone. Us is all right now. To-morrow is Lady Luck's trouble. Only thing whut kin hurt us is a train wreck."

II

Bulging with victory and filling the air with garlic-flavored snorts of triumph, Frank Manzanni, nominally a humble Italian fisherman whose entire crew consisted of one faithless Wildcat, journeyed south from Seattle, where with the assistance of his patron saint he had put over the biggest bootlegging deal of his skyrocket career.

In San Francisco, Grandpa Manzanni, the Manzanni children and a fringe of nieces and nephews and cousins listened with wide eyes while the new prince of bootleggers related the non-technical details of his illicit enterprise.

"Of the finest case goods, fifty dozens, delivered in the open sea. Calculate, if you can, the profit. The cost—less than a thousand dollars. The value—sold to the retail trade, seven thousand dollars—and this is but a beginning."

"Viva Garibaldi!" Grandfather of Manzanni clicked his two remaining teeth together in an ecstasy of anticipation. "The law of Volstead—ritzi! What care the Manzanni for law? Pass the red wine! Drink deep to this son of the house who has accomplished this whale-sized victory over the tyrant's code which would forbid the enjoyment of life, liberty and alcohol!"

III

At evening, on board the *Grayling*, swinging at anchor out from the white sand beach which fronted the seaside house owned and enjoyed by Mrs. Craven-Waite, Sir Rennygade Wye-Flynch gargled his conversation into Mrs. Craven-Waite's pink and eager ears.

Festivities on land and sea, running neck and neck, had taxed the social engineering abilities of the yacht's owner and the queen of the country place, until now, with their fifty glittering guests nicely cheered on the tenth cocktail, the responsible parties enjoyed the momentary lull which preceded the dinner bugle.

Mrs. Craven-Waite complimented the host on his ability to create delightful parties out of more or less raw human material.

"You flatter me," Sir Rennygade demurred. "Cocktails, ragtime radio and the ground-swell that's running ought to bring Christmas cheer to a convict colony. If this breeze freshens, perhaps the brutal bevy would better go ashore after dinner—health and strength of the dear old guests, nausea and what not."

"Right-o!" Mrs. Craven-Waite agreed, speaking English as best she could. And then, when her gaze sought the steady horizon in a personal effort at stabilizing a more or less unsteady world: "What is that away out there, Renny?" she asked.

Sir Rennygade Wye-Flynch, followed Mrs. Craven-Waite's gesture, blinked his uncertain vision into the West. "Looks like a bull-nosed submarine. Not

responsible for visions though. Bacardi, you know —and the old optic nerve!"

A steward interrupted Sir Rennygade's inspection of the strange craft to the westward, and while Mrs. Craven-Waite and her companion devoted their attention to the business of dining on the swinging yacht, it left the bull-nosed submarine free from curious eyes, save for those of half a dozen personal revenue officers perched on a rocky headland half a mile down the coast.

Under this battery of inspection, the Wildcat navigated his likker-bearing bull-nosed submarine to a position abreast of the *Grayling* off the white sand beach which fringed the stretch of sea fronting Mrs. Craven-Waite's home.

At high tide, when the wind had died with the day, the Wildcat's craft, moving shoreward now under the gentle urge of the insistent surf, grounded on the white sands.

To this grey area on the silver crescent of the beach, intent on seeing what was what, the eyes of the law focused in selfish anticipation born of long experience in the profit-sharing possibilities of strange craft which now and then enjoyed the overtaxed sanctuary of the local harbor.

Confronted by the spokesman of the personal revenue crew, the Wildcat, sensing the situation, denied all connection with superior officers, bootleg rings, men higher up and illegal syndicates of the up-country coast. "Cap'n, naw-suh! Dese heah two animals is mine—de whale an' de goat. Me an' Lily

been travelin' togetheh 'round an' 'round. Me an' de whale met up some time back."

The chieftain of the personal revenue officers asked the Wildcat one more direct question. The Wildcat hesitated only an instant in replying, and then he invested all of his immediate financial future in one sentence. "I'se able to deliveh right heah an' now de finest likker you eveh tasted."

"How much?"

"Dese is quality goods. Dey costs you a hund'ed dollahs."

Action followed acceptance of the Wildcat's bargain, and three hours after midnight, in the fading moonlight, the basement of the liquor-bearing whale was cleared of its cargo.

In the white light of an electric lantern the Wildcat saw Lady Luck's cash counted out to him. "Ninety —ninety-five, one hund'ed! Dat's right, Cap'n. I hopes you doubles yo' money!"

The money involved in the transaction was as bogus as the bootlegger's smile.

The chief of the personal revenue officers grunted his belief in his ability to profit by the transaction and then, following the route taken by his assistants over toward two waiting motor trucks, he walked out of the Wildcat's world.

The Wildcat walked down to the water and looked for a while at the beached whale, high and dry now, fifty feet from the edge of the sea.

A little apart from him, indulging her appetite for

seaweed, the mascot goat enjoyed the feel of the firm sand under her feet. "Wait dere, Lily," the Wildcat ordered. "Eat heavy whilst I 'cumulates dese human things off'n dis heah Jonah fish."

The Wildcat clambered aboard the whale and retrieved the gear and the pike pole and the ax with which the seagoing transport had been rigged. He stowed his equipment away under a mass of driftwood farther up the beach and then, burdened with nothing but a clear conscience and five thousand dollars in counterfeit money he curled up in the shelter of an overhanging sand bank and slept himself forty ways from earthly cares.

Beside him, nibbling on a dessert of seaweed, Lily gave thanks unto the gods of the goat world for the termination of the unpleasant career of a seagoing bootlegger and followed the Wildcat into dreamland.

An hour after dawn the Wildcat was awakened by Sir Rennygade Wye-Flynch and Mrs. Craven-Waite and half a dozen of that lady's guests who were bound for an early morning dip in an effort to eliminate the mental cobwebs which had been spun during an evening devoted to hooch and hilarity.

The Wildcat sat up and batted his eyes until he was half awake, and then he agreed heartily with Sir Rennygade's opinion of the whale.

"Yass-suh, sho' does! Neveh seed no worse smell no place."

There followed an offer of twenty dollars if the Wildcat would pile enough driftwood about the whale to burn up the discouraged-looking wreck.

"Cap'n, suh, dere ain't 'nuff driftwood in de world to burn dat whale. Only way you-all kin git rid of him is wid dam'nite. I seed de San Framcisco folks try to burn up a ol' whale whut landed on de beach. Neveh seed such a stubborn whale! All dey did wuz scorch his pin-feathers wid all de wood an' oil in de world. Naw-suh! Dam'nite an' blow him into fish-bait is de only inflooence dat soggy ol' Jonah fish might listen to."

After negotiations covering three highly scented minutes, the Wildcat became party to a verbal contract to do the best he could in the matter of removing the objectionable visitor from the vicinity where nostrils quivered in disgust and curled in surrender to the invisible halo which emanated from the permanent-looking Jonah fish.

"Cap'n, suh, I gits de dam'nite in dis Monterey town right off an' mebbe late dis aftehnoon de ol' whale takes his last leapin' dive into de ocean."

IV

Frank Manzanni, prince of bootleggers, having exhausted his superlatives in his verbal efforts in the bosom of the Manzanni tribe, realized that he would do well to make good before he became the laughing-stock of cousins and nephews, children, grandparents and neighbors who had listened to his reports of anticipated profits.

When he missed his rendezvous with the whale, ten miles out of San Francisco, he forthwith dispatched a

set of cryptic telegrams to Canadian headquarters.

The answer to the third telegram was an absolute statement that the whale had been delivered at the designated point in the open sea according to contract and that by an explicit clause in the same contract responsibility for delivery ended therewith.

It was then that the Italian set forth in a borrowed boat in search of the sidetracked whale.

Before him, as his hunting-ground, was a long expanse of the Pacific Ocean. The whale detective, figuring tides and winds and currents, puttered down the coast.

Now and then his remarks fulminated high above the exhaust of the boat's engine.

In the late afternoon of the second day of his search, black against the white sandy beach fronting the seaside home of Mrs. Craven-Waite, the whale detective sighted his prey.

Immediately to his mind, lately schooled in several branches of the law's technicalities, there came the question of riparian ownership, three-mile limit, seaside property and the title to salvaged drifting property. He decided that a reasonable proof of ownership might convince the owner of the land on which the whale had stranded that title to the whale, and contents thereof, rested in the original promotor of the bootlegging enterprise.

Into the sound of revelry at evening, where out of doors were fifty of Mrs. Craven-Waite's guests, with Sir Rennygade Wye-Flynch and his yachting-party well up in the front rank, there prowled an outsider

whose name was Manzanni and whose business was the reclamation of a hooch-bearing whale.

Mrs. Craven-Waite, annoyed by the Italian's insistent misuse of the English language, summoned counsel.

The bootlegger, confronted by overwhelming numbers and social superiors, augmented the broken rhythm of his speech with gestures whose vigor made up for what they lacked in meaning.

At a moment when the bootlegger had sworn by fifty ancient saints to invoke the law of the land, the law stepped into the game.

It was a new brand of law, cloaked with chameleon authority, for now it seemed that the law's agents sought the arrest of one Frank Manzanni as a party to a series of violations suffered by an Act to prohibit the manufacture, transportation or sale of hooch.

The sound of revelry died out and its place was taken by argument and oaths, hearty bass threats from the throats of male guests, giggles and low screams and silvery feminine voices.

Upon the troubled waters of human affairs at that moment came a sudden gush of verbal oil which Sir Rennygade Wye-Flynch had used with marked success in Indiá and the Sudan.

Sir Rennygade, striding to the center of the stage, delivered himself of the first gargling phrase of a measured oration which promised to be the diplomatic triumph of a long and successful career. He rumbled back into the early stages when Babylon was a pup for his preliminary authorities. He followed the

thread of the laws of property down through the corridors of time as far as his third deep breath.

Expanding his chest, across whose expanse of immaculate linen gleamed a crimson product of the silkworm's industry flanked by half a dozen glittering examples of the tinsmith's art, he thundered along until his eloquence had backed the other animals out of the corral of oratory.

He came to a place where supplication to the high heavens dovetailed into the act, and here, with a sweeping gesture, he raised his hand toward the rising moon.

The gesture got results.

Rising above Sir Rennygade's words, the sharp crash of an explosion down on the beach was followed by a roar which bloomed in the garden of eardrums.

Then, out of the dark sky, came the first elaborate patter of minced whale meat which preceded a cloudburst of the same substance.

Sir Rennygade, considerably annoyed, bowed his lion-like head before the tempest of whale meat and brushed from his gleaming chest a decoration of the Order of Hamburger Steak.

Mrs. Craven-Waite, screaming the call to retreat, led her guests in a wild flight from the scene.

Midway of her gallop toward sanctuary she stumbled over a meteoric fragment of seagoing whale. The fragment was one of fifty which had landed on the green pasture of the lawn fronting the house. It was about the size of a faithful dog.

From his safety behind a rock down on the beach,

the Wildcat observed the phenomenon of the whale-destroying explosion.

When the sky-bound cascade of whale meat had fallen, he jerked quickly on his mascot goat's leading-string. "Come 'long heah, Lily. Seems like us aimed dat whale meat wrong. Chances is dem white folks won't crave li'l lumps of dat ol'-smellin' whale no betteh dan dey liked dat complete Jonah fish. Foller quick wid me—looks like dis minnit was made fo' leavin' purposes! Us prowls to San Francisco whah at de Pullman folks in Lost Anxious sez Ol' Demmy is runnin' out of. Las' time I seed him, he wuz runnin' out of luck. Craves to see dat boy."

CHAPTER XI

I

IN San Francisco the Wildcat located Demmy without much difficulty, inasmuch as the diminutive brunette had quit his Pullman job some weeks back in order to devote his time and money to the matrimonial conquest of one Tilly Meek. Success had crowned Demmy's efforts, but now, facing the stern realities of an impending wedding-ceremony, his sole object in life was to overtake his past luck.

The Wildcat, busy with the business of manicuring his mascot goat free from a collection of burrs which she had accumulated on a prowl through a weed-infested back lot in San Francisco, found time to ladle out a few helpings of free advice from his kettle of experience. The advice was directed at Demmy, who was helping calm the mascot goat during those painful movements when Lily's hair and hide were involved in the burr business. "Naw, suh, Demmy, you 'minds me of a mule bogged down in six-foot mud. I 'spect if plain fools wuz fo' bits apiece, us would buy two like you fo' a dollah."

To Demmy it seemed that upon the countenance which ordinarily smiled upon him, there suddenly had fallen a frown of censure and bitterness.

"You 'minds me of a bumblin' fly whut gits free f'm de sticky ol' fly papeh jes' in time to buzz back into de slough of doom," the Wildcat continued. "Stay away f'm dat Tilly Meek woman is all I tells you. Stay furder away ev'ry day. Lady Luck is waitin' fo' you whah Tilly ain't. Bes' thing you kin do is ketch a train wid a conductor man whut kain't see nuthin' but one-way tickets."

"Whah at is dis Chris'mus tree whah dese tickets grows?" Demmy grabbed at his first opportunity for returning a reasonable objection to the Wildcat's words. "Railroad tickets ain't layin' roun' loose like dis free advice. Ain't gwine neah dat woman, 'specially since dat numbeh-two husban' got free f'm de pen-o-tench'ry. Ain't gwine buy no tickets neitheh—reason is, wuz a nickel a earthquake, I'se steady as a stone church."

"'Yo' hind laigs is still middlin' agile ain't dey? Dey ain't no gates on de open roads. How 'bout settin' one foot down an' bringin' de otheh past it often 'nuff to git you f'm heah to whah dat woman kain't remembeh yo' name?"

Demmy did not reply for a little while and then, turning his face slowly toward the Wildcat, he spoke his principal reason for his reluctance at leaving. "Don't crave to go no place whah you an' Lily ain't. Seems lonesome like, widout you. S'pose I meets up wid Ol' Man Trouble—I ax you, Wilecat, how big would be leavin's be when de ruckus ended, 'less you wuz wid me?"

Through the Wildcat's mind drifted memories of a

dozen battles with Old Man Trouble wherein the enemy had met defeat by reason of Demmy's valiant assistance. He realized that an element of mutuality existed in the loneliness that Demmy suggested, and then, with no more substantial basis for his decision than a momentary whim, he declared himself.

"De main thing, Demmy, is to save you f'm dis ragin' Tilly, an' de one way to save you is to retreat wid you beyond dat woman's reach. De answer is, us travels! Mebbe wid me pullin' an' Lily boostin', us kin git you fur 'nuff 'long de misery road to see de sunshine bustin' through dis hard luck rain. Stand up on yo' hind laigs, Demmy, yo' po' li'l mule, an' us gits tromplin' befo' you gits mussed in one of dem parades whut delays, temp'rary, in front of a hitchin' preacher an' winds up permanent in de swamp of madrimony."

The Wildcat settled his hat a little more firmly on his head and addressed himself to the mascot goat. "Come 'long heah, Lily! Us travels."

Then and there, without further ceremony, began the impromptu and impetuous retreat from the field of romance in San Francisco where Demmy had surrendered to the attack waged by the mate-craving Tilly Meek.

Plodding along below San Mateo, with Demmy at his side, and with the mascot goat detouring now and then for an inviting bunch of roadside grass, the Wildcat quieted his raging appetite with half a dozen mumbled verses of "My Ol' Skillet."

"My ol' skillet, my cast iron skillet,
Neveh got me chicken 'nuff to fill it.
My ol' skillet is hen-house size,
Load it wid pullet meat an'
Lawd how it fries!
Fill it wid rabbit,
Gravy floatin' roun',
Hardly wait to grab it,
When de rabbit is brown."

"Demmy, dis fancy cookin' don't mean nuthin'. Neveh wuz nuthin' so good as dem rations whut come out of de ol' iron skillet whut Mis' Lou had in Memphis."

"Wilecat, hush! How come you all de time talks nutriment when us ain't et since dis famine started? 'Twixt whut my stummick tells me, an' whut you sez, I'se plumb deef. Dis road life is all right fo' dese grass-eatin' varmints like dat mascot Lily, but dey's dawg blood in me, an' I craves meat."

" 'Spect you'd eat fried fish did you get a chance—you got fish blood in you too. Yo' dawg blood done give me a idee whut mebbe us kin use."

"Kain't eat idees. If you craves to invent somethin', see kin you invent six pork chops sinkin' for de third an' las' time in brown gravy."

"Don't speak no mo' nutrifyin' words, Demmy! Dey makes my head plumb numb. Don't talk no mo' till I tells you how us kin make some ration money. You knows how crazy some folks is about watch dawgs whut watches nuthin' 'ceptin' at meal times. Some is crazy 'nuff to pay money fo' dem. Us passed

a million stray dawgs dis mawnin'. S'pose us 'cumulates a few dawgs now an' meets up wid a man down de road whut craves a fust-class blooded watch dawg mascot. Looks like somebody might loosen up 'bout fo' bits widout much 'suadin'."

Demmy received the great idea without much enthusiasm. "Depen's on de dawg. De idee is middlin' good so long as I don't git no hungrier. De way my stummick feels, one day mo' an' dawg meat gits its nameplate changed. I'se wid you to try it. Us retains de nex' dawg us meets. Is you got dat li'l piece of string whut festooned Lily?"

"I is. Us likely meets lots of dawgs at de edge of dis town. Looks like a dawg town. Run down an' ragged to whah it's de dawgest-lookin' town us is met since us left de ol' Miss'ip' country."

Approaching the dog-looking town, the personnel of the party was one Wildcat, one Demmy, and one mascot goat.

Leaving the town, the caravan had been augmented by the addition of one complex hound, one plain mongrel and a fur-bearing Airedale.

About the Airedale's neck was a ten-dollar collar, riveted to which was a silver plate bearing the names of the dog and his master. The Wildcat looked now and then at the nameplate. He turned to Demmy after one of these casual inspections. "I neveh learned no readin', Demmy, an' de less you sees, de less you knows. De big sale begins at de nex' town befo' I learns to read."

The next stop was in Mayfield, and true to the

Wildcat's prediction the big dog sale began with a flying start. Leading his flock, the Wildcat approached a white man who was at the moment busily engaged in leaning against an unoccupied section of a roadside fence.

"Cap'n, suh, does you crave to buy a fust-class dawg at redoosted rates?" The inquirer turned and waved grandly at his line of samples. "Case dey ain't nuthin' pleasant to yo' eyes in dis pack, de chances is us kin display 'zactly de dawg you needs by dis time tomorr'."

The white man glanced at the dogs, and then his more deliberate gaze swept Demmy and the mascot goat. It rested at last on the Wildcat's feet and then, traveling upward, it met the sunshine of the dog salesman's hopeful smile.

The white man's eyes were gray, and his glance was cold, and the sunshine that radiated from the Wildcat's countenance somehow failed to alter the temperature of the inspector's vision. "Where did you get them dawgs?"

From the tone of the question, the Wildcat suspected that it was prompted by something more sinister than a casual desire for useless information. "Cap'n, suh, kain't just say de exact spot. Didn't 'zactly git 'em —dey sort of drug along whilst us wuz ramblin' by."

"Who do they belong to—you or the other boy?"

"Dey b'longs even—even, dat is, as dawgs kin belong. Fifty-fifty to me an' Demmy. Us is dawg pardners in dis bisness."

"How much do you want for the little one?"

"Dat spin'lin' dawg is 'bout two-dollah size as dawgs go. De market value on de middlin' size is a dollah mo', an' fo' de whisker-faced one wid de leatheh chokin'-strap us is askin' five dollahs."

The white man looked at the Wildcat for a moment and then he smiled the same brand of smile that a rattlesnake uses just before he parks his fangs. "I'll take the dogs," he said. "All of 'em. You two boys better bring 'em along to my place."

Escorted by the white man, the party began a short march which ended at the portals of a wooden yelp-warehouse on the edge of town. Over the door of this building was a signboard on which was painted, in sinister red, two words—"City Pound."

Demmy, silent until now, read the sign. He sensed a great error in the industry that had engaged him, and his suspicions were confirmed a moment later when the white man displayed a nickel-plated star as a prelude to his duty of broadcasting the details of their misfortune to the two captains of dog industry.

"Leave the dogs here," the white man ordered. "Leave 'em here and come along with me."

Over at the jail, which to the Wildcat's bulging eyes appeared to be an exceptionally permanent-looking structure, the white man elaborated the details and specifications of the crime to a magistrate whose indifference to the march of justice did not include the matter of cash income.

"The theft of dogs and the sale of stolen property!" The Judge turned to Wildcat. "What have you to say in your own defense?"

"Cap'n, suh, I don't know whut to say 'ceptin' de weatheh sho' is hot fo' dis time in de month. 'Bout dis dog bizness, us ain't sold none yit as fur as gittin' money fo' dem. If us neveh sells none, dat suits me grand. Ain't stole no dogs, neither. Jes' found dem trailin' 'long, sympathetic like, an' plain hongry same as me an' Demmy."

"Jail 'em!" The Judge nodded his head quickly. "Hard labor on the woodpile."

Three minutes later the Wildcat and Demmy were enjoying the privilege of sawing up three cords of wood while across the judge's desk, in conference with the local official, the arresting officer handed himself a compliment. "I guess we get that wood sawed up all right. Seems to me the penalty is just about the same size as that woodpile—with maybe a little white-washing job and a lawn-trimming chaser."

"Yep. Let 'em go when we get cleaned up on this work 'round the place. This wave of crime rolled in at about the right time. You made a lucky pick-up."

In the evening, after they had been served with a heavy ration of meat and potatoes, a quart of coffee and four thick slices of bread, the Wildcat and Demmy began to see the hand of Lady Luck in what they had thought was ordinary plain trouble.

"Sho' is noble rations," the Wildcat mumbled with his mouth full of nutriment. "Dis jail bizness ain't so bad, Demmy, pervided it lasts. Main trouble wid jails is dey is so temp'rary. Dese heah beds is good, dese rations is betteh dan whut us et in de army, an' it looks like us is stuck fas' in de glue of joy."

From her corner of the cell where she was busy with a freshly trimmed sackful of lawn grass the mascot Lily volunteered an affirmation of the Wildcat's statement. "Blaa-a!"

"Dat's right, Lily. You know whut us sez is right. Sho' settin' purty. Wouldn't mind boardin' heah in dis ol' jail f'm now on. Us hopes dis jail luck holds out through de winter."

The good luck held out, according to the schedule arranged by a higher authority, about as long as the woodpile lasted. When the wood was sawed and piled and after a few assorted jobs of whitewashing had been accomplished, the Wildcat and Demmy were again hauled before the bar of justice and sentenced to an unlimited period of liberty as far as the local powers were concerned.

That night, minus the accompaniment of dogs, but with the faithful mascot beside them, the two victims of liberty resumed their southward march toward what they hoped would be a new zone of Lady Luck's benevolence.

They made their camp for the night at nine o'clock, invading for the purpose of shelter an abandoned building that stood close beside the highway. "No matteh how soon it's gwine to fall down, Demmy, whilst it sheds de dew an' rain dey ain't no place like home."

"Main thing about dis home, Wilecat, is whut ain't. Includin' groceries. Home ain't home to amount to much 'less dey's a cook stove goin' full blast wid somethin' hot an' fillin' on de top an' biskits in de oven."

"Neveh you mind, Demmy. Now dat my feet gits a furlough, I lets my haid do de work like dat Memphis boy, Honeytone Boone, and befo' us knows it de rations comes our way. Dat boy had mo' schemes whut brung in de money an' kep' out de back-bustin' work dan ennybody I'se met. Lemme think—wuz me Honeytone whut would he do?"

With the fatigue of the day's march heavy upon him, the Wildcat, verging the borderland of sleep, wrinkled his brow in a mighty effort at solving the problem of getting something for nothing.

"Kain't start no chu'ch," he mumbled. "Kain't start no lodge nor no buryin'-club. Kain't start nuthin' whut takes j'inin' folks. Only thing left dat Honeytone might try is dis healin' miracle bizness wid a hat passed at ev'ry healin'. Hot dam! Demmy, come awake till us tells you de good luck to-morr' is 'fested wid. When us gits to de nex' town, you prowls down de main street, fust, all crippled in yo' legs like a mule had failed to miss you. At de barbeh shop, o' else mebbe in front de groc'ry sto' whah folks 'cumulates de most, you stops an' holds yo' mis'ry in yo' anguished grasp. Den, whilst folks is rallyin' round, along comes me an' Lily ridin' de unseen chariot of faith. When I sights you I sez: 'Folks, how come dis nigger so downtrod an' twisted in de clutch of Satan?' Sympathizin' folk sez de po' boy is 'flicted. I tells 'em: 'Stan' back!' An den I makes de healin' passes an' de mystic signs oveh you an' up you gits wid no mo' mis'ry dan a fish needs rubbah boots. Some white man passes de hat an' de

sobbin' sisters heaves a sigh an' drops mebbe two dollahs' wuth of widow's mite into de hat. Ev'ry time I heals you, us gits mebbe two dollars—an' I aims to heal you fo' to six times in ev'ry town us comes to. Dat's de ol' stand-by, Demmy! Neveh failed dat Honeytone Boone no time yit when——"

A snore from Demmy interrupted the Wildcat's outline of the technique that he proposed to use in accomplishing their impending prosperity. With a grunt in which was mingled hunger, hope, and disappointment at his partner's lack of interest, the rainbow-painter settled himself for the night.

"Heah us is, Lady Luck," he prayed. "Rally roun' an' shower down de money rain to-morr' when dis miracle man begins de healin' ruckus."

CHAPTER XII

I

A MILE ahead of the Wildcat the advance agent and victim of the healing ruckus hobbled into town.

In Demmy's part of the act there was a semblance of reality, for the long miles that he had covered had left their mark and his twisted gait was twice as legitimate as the sympathy it inspired in passers-by who observed him.

He established himself on the sunny side of the street, leaning easily against the front of the village barber shop where, according to their plans, he awaited the Wildcat.

About the time Demmy got himself comfortably settled, the Wildcat, stepping high under the lightness of his inspiration, but feeling medium heavy under his cargo of hunger, invaded an area of temptation wherein a promising-looking stray rooster from a nearby chicken ranch was trying his best to cross the road. The Wildcat saw the rooster and immediately upon the canvas of his imagination was painted a fried chicken interior decoration whose richer tones, tempered with brown gravy, fought for supremacy with

the high lights of a fresco of yaller yams and yaller corn bread.

"Goat, at ease! As you is, whilst us konkers ol' eagle-foot!"

Leaving Lily to her own devices, the Wildcat shifted into high before his left foot touched the ground, and in seventeen leaps of varying length and direction he overtook his prey. One quick swing of his trained right hand, a quick recovery, and the feathered victim disappeared into the Wildcat's army shirt where he bulged submissively under his captor's left arm.

The victor returned to where Lily awaited him. "Come 'long, goat! De fust drop of de luck rain done hit us. Beginnin' soon, us gits wet an' eats heavy."

His prediction concerning the business of getting wet in the rain of luck was good, because, at the first moment of the self-congratulation process, out of the corner of his eye the Wildcat saw a white man coming across the field in his direction. He realized that the luck rain was fast changing into a cloudburst, but that the luck, for the moment, was the kind showered down by Old Man Trouble.

The retreater grabbed at Lily's leading-string and began a flanking escape down the road into the village, hitting the high spots and limited only by Lily's capacity for speed. The Wildcat felt the need of Demmy's moral support. "Sho' craves to find dat boy. Ol' Demmy sho' strong as de Rock when you is smote by de hand of Fate."

Waiting at his appointed post of suffering, Demmy,

busy absorbing all the sunlight that radiated in his direction, prayed for the moment when the healing process might begin. He doubted his ability to remain a cripple for more than half an hour at a time. About him was an interested group whose members had heard, over and over, with the arrival of each new individual, the full and complete story of Demmy's affliction.

Into this complex scene, galloping something less than sixty miles an hour, the rooster-bearing faith-healer traveled with Lily at his heels.

He gained his sawed-off companion's side and a record-breaking cure was effected in one quick command. "Git gallopin' wid me!"

Something in the Wildcat's voice, conveying an instantaneous conviction of necessity, galvanized the twisted Demmy's inert person into what became the semblance of a miniature cyclone.

Half a block down the street, and still going strong, the Wildcat began to explain. "White man needs us; I seed him comin'."

"How come?" Demmy, using most of his breath for running purposes, sought an explanation that would give his mind the relief that his feet needed most.

"Don't ask me now. Rooster looked me in de eye. Run heavy!"

Enough was enough and Demmy wasted no more breath on speech until the trio had gained the sanctuary of a clump of willows which fringed the dry bed of a brook a mile beyond the danger zone. Here, reviewing their progress up to the present moment, Demmy

expressed his sentiments in a manner which indicated the disintegration of the structure of faith in which he had parked his respect for the Wildcat's judgment.

"You always starts right, Wilecat—an' always ends up wrong. Us leaves San F'mcisco on de lef' foot, gits mixed up in de dog ruckus, an' winds up in jail. Us begins dis magic healin' scheme an' gits out of dat bizness one jump in de lead of some mo' gallopin' grief. Us ain't et fo' de longes' time, an' you tells me 'bout a ol' roosteh chicken whut you run too fas' to retain. Seems to me like ev'ything you starts Ol' Man Trouble ends up fo' you."

"Who said de chicken wuz losted?"

The Wildcat produced the discouraged-looking rooster from where it had been stored. "Ain't los' nuthin' connected wid dis animal so far. You does yo' complainin' too sudden, Demmy. Hol' yo' fire till you sees yo' mark. Done retained dis ration varmint. Hush yo' mouth an' git a li'l fire blazin'! Us needs de hot coals mo' dan us does yo' talk."

Ten minutes later an assortment of chicken feathers had mingled with the landscape and a little while, after the Wildcat had double-timed himself with "My Ol' Skillet," the bird, beautifully roasted on a green willow branch, was ready for the twin destroyers. "Whuf! Dat animal sho' lasted quick. Done seems like de bes' I'se eveh tasted!"

"Ain't no question—sho' was de bes'. All I craves now is a slug of sleep 'bout three days long filled up wid dreams of how good a chicken kin taste when he tries his best."

Until long after noon of the next day the pair of wanderers, undisturbed except by the phantoms of retribution which invaded their dreams, got all the sleep that was being passed around, and then two weeks of intermittent walking and a brief period of service on a night job with a southbound bootlegger who operated on a five-ton truck basis found the Wildcat and Demmy and their mascot goat free and away from the cool airs and the afternoon fogs of the North and deep into the persistent sunshine which floods the Los Angeles country.

While they were still thirty miles north of the City they noted with quickened interest the increase in the motor traffic round them, profiting meanwhile from the surplus of free food that is available to the wanderer in the land of Nature's kindest moods.

Loaded up with a dozen kinds of fruit, Demmy, as usual, toyed with his luck by criticising the monotony of their menu. "As us said befo', Wilecat, dey's dawg blood in me an' I craves a steady eatin'-job whah I helps de butcher boys git along. Us craves meat!"

"You an' me both. Dese heah fruit rations is fillin' but you burns out too sudden. I craves me a steady job wid steady meat an' bread mo' dan all de temp'rary juicy nutriment in de world."

Lady Luck gave an attentive ear, this time, to the expressed desires of her protégé, for less than a mile ahead of the point where he broadcast his ambitions the steady job awaited him. The agent of Lady Luck in this instance was young Ross Davis of the Stupendous Aggregation Feature Films.

Shooting sheik stuff with a crew of Arabs from Dixie, the Director was short-handed and in need of men to augment his sunburned mob of Sahara gun-wavers, and the steady job stared Demmy and the Wildcat in the face the moment they encountered it. The stare was so direct that their surrender to the clutch of toil was practically instantaneous. "Ten dollars a day on bareback surprise raids," the director explained. "Ten a day on location and seven-fifty on the lot."

"Cap'n, yessuh! When does us begin work?"

"You begin now."

The Wildcat blinked his eyes. "You means us gits ten dollahs fo' ridin' a ol' hoss bareback ev'ry day?"

"What I said."

"Sounds grand. Sho' all right wid me an' Demmy."

"Get your clothes off and get into a prop robe and go to it. Each one of you carries one of these long guns. Wave it when you gallop."

Twenty minutes later, while the camera diaphragms were pinched to a sunset exposure, Demmy and the Wildcat joined a cavalcade waiting under a row of waving palm trees for the signal that would start the surprise attack upon a caravan whose chieftain held in duress vile the pearl-draped person of Viola Flannagan.

The signal came, and while the cameras cranked twelve, from their hiding-places the Wildcat and Demmy galloped straight toward the tents of the caravan, across the burning sands.

Midway of the race the Wildcat yelled loudly at Demmy. "Doggone dis bare-ab stuff! Neveh rid

me such a sharp hoss! Gits myself cut into twins does he keep jumpin'!"

Demmy, crouched like an ape, saved his strength for clinging purposes and attempted no reply. He rode for a ten-dollar goal, praying the while for life enough to let him spend the money after the race had been run.

When the negatives of the desert stuff reached the projecting-room, standing out distinctly in the foreground were the Wildcat and Demmy. In spite of their makeup and their guns and the long flowing robes, the Arab effect was lost in the sea of normal characteristics displayed by the pair and it was here that the director, being mentally ambidextrous, sensed the ludicrous element in the film and switched it to a comedy feature. He singled out the two riders next day and addressed to them a statement of his desires. "I want you two boys in some singles and some stills back on the lot. We'll shoot them right away. Go over and get into my car."

In the director's car the Wildcat and Demmy were forthwith hauled to the company's stage on the Hollywood lot, where they invested fourteen hours of their time before they came to a break in the work. Young Ross Davis had lost a man or two midway of another film and, having made one bad bet on the present production, he was resolved to take no chances on the personnel of this comedy revision of the Viola Flannagan superfeature.

Shooting a final scene at nine o'clock on Saturday morning, the Wildcat was held on the lot until these

latest negatives could be developed. Never for a moment did he or Demmy escape the watchful eyes of the man responsible for the production.

"Trail along with me, son."

"Cap'n, yessuh!"

The Wildcat felt that he was on the verge of prosperity and ease, and until the early afternoon, when word came from the projecting-room that one of the important climaxes would have to be shot again, he trailed along. "Just like bein' in jail," he reflected when temporary freedom was again denied him. "Wisht I could see ol' Demmy an' dat doggone mascot goat!"

II

Later in the afternoon, when pay-day hung on the knife edge of probability, the Wildcat, still under the watchful eye of Ross Davis, was spotted in the front seat of the director's car beside the driver. In the rear seat, carrying a leather pouch, was the company paymaster. Half an hour later the party had started from the downtown source of the cash back to the lot where the pay-craving performers awaited their reward for work performed.

Midway of the ride the Wildcat braced himself and uttered a reiteration of his former inquiry, dwelling heavily on his hunger for real money.

"Cash don't do you any good," the director returned. "Probably won't last you over an hour when you get

it. What do you figure on doing with what you have coming to you?"

"Cap'n, suh, I aims to exercise my teeth, eatin' myself blue in de face fo' de fust thing. Den mebbe I 'cumulates me a bottle of gin. Sho' tired out."

"Chances are you'll ace into a crap game and shoot the works."

"Kain't do dat, does dey know me. I shines wid de clickers—been shinin' eveh since my uncle learned me how to sidetrack de dooce, trey an' twelve."

Mr. Ross Davis' casual interest quickened instantly to the point where an immediate demonstration of this unusual technique was demanded. "Let's see some of this fancy stuff."

"Kain't shoot nuthin' widout ammonition. Neveh seed no bones yit whut wuz good at dis makin' believe. Mebbe could you boon me wid mah wages now, de clickers might prowl middlin' right."

The director turned to the paymaster beside him. "This boy has five days coming to him. Give it to him and let's see him go."

The paymaster opened the leather pouch which he was guarding and extracted therefrom a package of ten-dollar bills from which he counted five. He handed the money to the Wildcat. "Here's what's coming to you."

"Cap'n, yessuh! Cash, I'se sho' glad to meet you!" The Wildcat twisted round in the front seat of the car and extended his hand for the money that was coming to him. Then, from his left shoe he fished

out his pet and pussonal clickers. "You craves to see 'em pufform right now?" he asked.

"Now or never. Roll 'em." It was the director who spoke.

"Cap'n, yessuh!" And then, instead of shooting the ten-cent bet that his audience expected, he crumpled the fifty dollars into a ball and dropped it on the floor of the car. "Shoots fifty! Fade me, white folks, an' repent."

Ross Davis, up against the unexpected, acted with the snap judgment which was one of his most expensive characteristics. Without batting an eye, he reached for his roll and faded the bet. "Roll 'em. You're covered."

Over his shoulder the Wildcat glanced at the speedometer needle of the speeding car. "Fifty-mile babies, work yo' way!" He slid the dice along the ends of his fingers. "Picture babies, show me Lady Luck! Wham—an' dey reads e-o-leven! Lets it lay. Fade me, white folks, an' double yo' speed!"

The director, with his own roll shy of the amount needed, reached an informal hand into the leather pouch between the paymaster's feet. "It's all right, Al," he said. "Let me have some wild money."

The Wildcat's hundred was faded with payroll cash.

"Pay-day dice, meet yo' mates. You knows yo' director. On de trail wid de burglar side up! Whuf! An' dey sez six-ace! Dat's two hund'ed, an' still it rambles."

Ross Davis, enjoying a few bonehead notions about

the law of probability, counted out two hundred dollars and crumpled it into a ball. He pitched the ball for a strike to a position beside the stake on the floor of the car. "That's a two-spot," he said, and now the kindly quality of his normal voice was drowned in a feverish overtone. "Roll 'em and wreck your luck!"

The Wildcat, breathing hotly upon the twin cubes, sought to inspire them with a whispered phrase of encouragement. "Ham-bone babies, drip yo' money soup! Pay-day freckles, on yo' face! Wham! An' us sees—de twelve cash apostles wid one A.W.O. Lovely. Dat's 'leven f'm heaven!"

Using the next two seconds subsequent to this latest victory in making a quick survey of his opponent's countenance, the Wildcat found enough stubborn determination thereon to justify an attempt at a still higher stake. He declared himself. "Dat's fo' hund'ed an' I lets it lay. Shoot de crop!"

"Damn!" Under his breath the director expressed his opinion of his own foolishness. He reached again into the pay-day pouch and presently a mate to the Wildcat's four hundred had been counted out.

The driver of the car, torn between curiosity and duty, slowed down to a five-mile rate so that he might safely devote some of his time to watching the slaughter.

"Roll 'em! Your're faded. Nobody ever made four straight passes in an automobile. If you do' it's a hearse. When I drag it back this time you walk."

"Cap'n, yessuh," and then to the dice the Wildcat

addressed his plea. "Barb hooks, fang yo' fish! Pay-day buglers, sound de pay-day rag! Whuf!—an' dey reveals six an' a solo!"

At this stage of the killing, uncertain as to how far his little playmate might follow along, craving to quit while the quitting was good and yet afraid of what the white man might do if he dragged out, the Wildcat pulled down all but one hundred of his winnings and thereafter, except for one unfortunate pass whose perfection was all gummed up by an uneven place in the street surface, the reaper cut his way into the harvest of long green almost as rapidly as the cash could be counted out.

It was five o'clock when the party arrived at the lot where the members of the company were awaiting the paymaster. As soon as the car stopped, the Wildcat alighted and immediately thereafter he sneaked round the corner of the building behind which Demmy had tethered the mascot goat. He saw Demmy milling with the rest of the crowd and he waved at him, but the diminutive brunette failed to get the signal.

Demmy's mind, at the moment, was receptive to but one thing, and that one was the expected summons from the paymaster.

Ten minutes later, dragging along in an abject shuffle inspired by utter hopelessness, he came round the corner of the building and encountered the Wildcat, who, just then, was busy giving Lily a lecture on the curse of great wealth.

"Heah you is, goat, happy wid grass, an' when I stakes you to a fo'-bit seegar you tries to swallow de

whole thing widout chewin' it none. Dat shows yo' hog blood. Den whut happens? You likes to choke to death. Come 'long heah befo' I knocks you loose f'm livin'—heah's ol' Demmy. Now us travels!"

Demmy cut in with a statement. "Us don't travel none till dat white man gits back wid de pay-day money."

"Whut white man?"

"Pay-day man. Us waitin' fo' hours an' all de pay us gits is him 'splainin' dat de banks is shut till Monday. Chances is by Monday dat boy kain't be found wid bloodhounds. Don't aim to start no ruckus wid no white folks, Wilecat, but it looks like Ol' Man Trouble sho' bust hisself to-day."

"Fo'git yo' mumblin' an' tie dat string round Lily's neck. Us hits de road an' hits it now."

"Ain't tyin' no string. Ain't doin' nuthin'—aims to stay heah till us gits de cash wages."

"Git dem hind laigs workin', Demmy, befo' I makes dis goat eat you. Dat white man don't mean nuthin' to us. Only pay-day you gits is whut dese pay-day dice brung in. Boy craved action an' got it."

"Whut boy you mean?"

"Pay-day boy. Who owns de dice, I ax you? All de pay-day money is in my pockets—'stid of fifty dollahs you gits yo' half of whut de pay-day dice drug in. Goin' on three thousan' dollahs. You tells me dey wuz money in de movies—us broadcasts de flop-eared world dey is, so long as de dice keeps movin'. Ol' director mebbe kin shoot de picture but us shoots dese pay-day dice. Git goin'! Us craves gin!"

CHAPTER XIII

ON the morning of the seventh day of a week which had been cursed by too much prosperity, the Wildcat steadied himself against the wall of a restless room in the Old Home Rooming-House in Los Angeles and spoke encouraging words to Demmy.

"Rise up, Demmy! R'ar back f'm dat bed of ease and see kin you stand on yo' own hind laigs."

From his bed in the corner of the room Demmy croaked a weak reply. "Done tried to, Wilecat. Ol' Demon Rum wrastled me down an' seems to be hangin' on. When I tries to sit up, seems like I'se slidin' a mile a minnit on a bob-sled. I closes my eyes an' I swoops through de air like a eagle. When I opens 'em I hits a brick chimley."

"I knows. Boy, you needs sourdeen fishes an' wateh. Wait till I gits back."

The Wildcat ducked out to a near-by grocery, returning three minutes later with an open can of sardines and a pitcher of water. "Eat dese heah sourdeens, Demmy," he directed, "an' den give 'em swimmin'-room wid dis wateh an' de chances is you gits resurrected f'm yo' mis'ry."

Demmy ate the sardines and drank half of the contents of the pitcher. "Whuff! Wilecat, f'm de way

I feels, I 'spect dat gin wuz dynamite juice extract of dis sleepin'-sickness I heard so much of."

"Might been. Dat likker drunk all right goin' down but right dere it quit bein' fren'ly. Rouse up an' see kin you stand on yo' feet."

Demmy roused up and discovered that he was able to stand on his feet. "I'se betteh now. Dem sourdeens acts jes' like med'cine."

"Dey is med'cine. Dem Chinee doctor boys in San F'mcisco uses 'em dried—chances is dey is good med'cine. Come out wid me whilst us gits some heavy rations."

"Mebbe I betteh stay heah, Wilecat, an' guard dis mascot goat whilst you goes back to dat movie outfit an' see kin you git us hired on."

"Don't crave no mo' work wid dem movie folks. All time prowlin' roun' an' missin' meals. Us craves to eat steady—three meals a day an' two at night."

"I stays heah wid Lily till evenin'. Feels mighty feeble. Git 'long out an' git yo'self nutrified. When you comes back bring me some mo' sourdeen fishes. Kinda like to have me some sass'prilla an' gingersnaps wid dem fishes, an' to-night, when I'se coöperated an' my haid ain't so plumb numb, us rallies roun' de groanin' board an' eats heavy. 'Nother thing befo' you goes—betteh leave half yo' money wid me. Dem dollahs is roun', Wilecat, an' dey ain't got no barbs like fish-hooks whut makes 'em stick in yo' pocket. You know how you is wid money."

"Demmy, as usual yo' words is festooned wid de gospel truth. Heah you is!"

The Wildcat hauled out a substantial roll of bills and split the stake. He handed a little more than half of the money to Demmy. "Dere you is! Even two hund'ed dollahs. Watch dat Lily goat keerful an' I brings you de sourdeens an' dat sass'prilla an' gingersnaps."

An hour later the Wildcat returned to the room in the Old Home Hotel carrying a cargo of canned fish and sass'prilla pop and gingersnaps to which he had added a pound of peanuts. "Eat dese heah goobers, Demmy. Dey sets heavy on yo' stummick an' settles it."

The combined effect of sardines, peanuts, pop and gingersnaps was so excellent that at six o'clock the invalid had recovered his health and was strengthened to a degree which enabled him to meet and conquer three dollars' worth of assorted rations in a restaurant near the adobe which had sheltered his fragile form.

After two hours of strenuous work at the dining-table, during which the mascot Lily, standing close beside the Wildcat, consumed her share of the gratifying rations, the Wildcat pushed back his chair. "Whuff! Demmy, seems like all dat heaven needs to be is a lunch counter long 'nuff to leave plenty of elbone room fo' dem whut gits saved. You 'members whut de man says 'bout de burnt chile cravin' de fire?"

"Man sez de burnt chile dreads de fire."

"Man whut I mean says he craves it. Like to got burnt up wid dat gin—but dat wuz yestiddy. Right now, toppin' off dis gran' meal I craves me mebbe one drink."

Demmy devoted all of three seconds to an analysis of his personal ambition, and then: "Me an' you both, Wilecat! Seems like de longes' time since me an' de Demon Rum tells each otheh good-bye. I takes dis mascot goat back to de Old Home an' waits fo' you whilst you rounds up some broad-minded bootlegger. All I tells you is don't be too long! Folks is died of thirst an' all dem sourdeen fishes I et is got me plumb dry."

"I'se on my way, Salt Neck! Pay de man an' don't delay me. If Lady Luck guides my feet, I 'cumulates de gin an' sees you fifteen minnits afteh I gits it."

The Wildcat's feet were guided gin-ward by Lady Luck, but following close behind that goddess and her protégé trailed Old Man Trouble.

A few blocks from the Old Home, the Wildcat reached a zone of loungers of his own color, and in this friendly environment three or four questions aimed at innocent bystanders served to chart a course which terminated in the back room of the Shady Rest.

The Shady Rest was nominally a soft-drink emporium, carrying an annex where a sideline of sandwiches and gambling could be obtained by those who sought light nutriment or heavy money.

In confidential syllables the Wildcat told his story to Sap Kerrfew, the proprietor of the place. "I hails f'm Memphis," the gin-craver explained. "I'se a Wilecat f'r gin an' I'se on my prowl."

Sap Kerrfew, who had paid tribute to half a dozen prohibition agents, real and false, subjected the Wild-

cat to a brief examination. "Whut lodge is you 'filiated wid?"

"In Memphis I joined de colored Damons. In San Francisco I wuz temp-o-rary Soopreem Leader of de Temple of Luck."

"Whut you doin' down heah?"

"Huntin' gin jes' now. Me an' my podneh Demmy is worked some f'r de movie man whut made dat bare-ab picture whah ev'rybody run hogwild an' half nekked in de hot country roun' Egypt."

"Lemme see yo' money." Sap Kerrfew was satisfied on every point except one.

The Wildcat fished out his roll. "Boy, I'se got money. Broadcast de world I ain't neveh tried to buy no gin 'less I wuz 'quipped wid cash." He displayed his roll of bills, holding it close in front of Sap Kerrfew's bulging eyes, and on the instant the mood of the proprietor of the Shady Rest changed to one where a glad-hand vocabulary served to mask a covetous eagerness.

"Brotheh, I says you has money! Set down an' make yo'self comfortable whilst I locates de gin."

The Wildcat sat down and Sap Kerrfew left the room. He detoured in his search for gin long enough to indulge in a quick telephone conversation with an unknown wise man to whom one word was sufficient, and then, retrieving a bottle of clear liquid which smelled something like a first-aid treatment, he returned to where the Wildcat awaited him.

"Heah you is! De regular price is twenty dol-

lahs but I lets you have it fo' fifteen. I warns you dis heah is double strength."

"It an' me both! Sho' is obliged to you, Sap, fo' dis favor."

The Wildcat peeled a twenty-dollar bill from his roll and when the change had been returned to him he stuffed it carelessly into a pocket of his vest. "Chances is I comes back later to play me a return date wid yo' likker. I tells you so-long now an' I sho' is much obliged to meet you."

"Wait a minnit, Wilecat, whilst I mixes you a drink to cheer you on yo' way. Learned mixin' dis drink at a bar in N'Orluns whah all de white folks whut bought wuz quality trade."

The Wildcat hesitated and was lost. "Whut name does you call dis fancy drink?"

"Ain't got no right name—somethin' like a Sarzerac cocktail. Gin'rally I calls it a avalanche punch, account it's got both heft an' speed. Wait whilst I bring 'em."

Sap Kerrfew, sparring for time until the unknown man arrived, adjourned to the front of the Shady Rest emporium where from an open bottle of bootleg gin he poured two drinks. Into one of these he added a shot of ether from a rubber-corked can. He carried the two drinks into the back room of his establishment and set the one containing the accelerator in front of the Wildcat.

The Wildcat sniffed at it. "Sap, sho' smells like a fancy drink. Heah's hopin' you never needs nuthin'

but a ol' man's tombstone! Whuff!" The toastmaster batted his eyes, coughed heartily and regained his vision in time to see a stranger enter the room.

The proprietor of the Shady Rest got to his feet. "Wilecat, lemme interdooce a confidential brotheh f'm down whah you comes. Dis is de leadin' real estate man an' all-roun' spo't of dese parts. Name Misteh Festus King. King by name an' king by nature. Misteh King, dis heah is de Wilecat—so far as I knows."

"Baptized wid de wet-haid name of Marsden," the Wildcat supplemented. "Vitus Marsden, an' sho' glad to meet you."

Sap Kerrfew grabbed the conversation. "Set down, gents, whilst I rummages roun' an' sees kin I perduce."

The gents sat down.

Sap Kerrfew used ten minutes in the business of producing and what he produced was another trio of drinks, to one of which had been added the ether uplift which had flavored the Wildcat's first avalanche cocktail.

"Here's howdy!" Festus King offered, and after the howdy had been quaffed: "What bizness did you say you wuz in?"

"No bizness right at dis minnit. I been in de movies an' de fish bizness an' de lodge bizness an' I'se done me some work on trains, besides bein' in de golf bizness in San F'mcisco an' goin' on two yeahs wid de stevodo' shock troops in de A.E.F."

Festus King was silent for a moment, and then: "Sho' is proud to 'sociate wid a vet'ran of de A.E.F.,"

he stated. "How long wuz you in de golf bizness?"

"Goin' on two days, whilst I wuz waitin' fo' Cap'n Jack in San Framcisco—he's my white folks."

"Sho' big money in de golf bizness."

"Sho' is! Fust day when I wuz helpin' hunt dem raisin' golfs an' packin' de weapons 'roun' Lincoln Park, I makes me goin' on five dollahs."

"De main money is in raisin' golf balls."

"Sho' is. Sho' lots money raisin' golf balls." Up to that moment the Wildcat had not known the source of the crop of golf balls which bloomed and faded throughout the golf season, but for the time being he refrained from any violent display of his ignorance of the subject.

"Yessuh!" Festus King continued. "Rubbeh trees I guess pays more dan golf ball orchards, but dat is 'count of automobeels usin' so many tires an' account rubbeh boots an' garden hose."

"Sho' is." The Wildcat conceded three points.

Festus King sketched the plan and elevation of the rubber industry. "You plants some li'l ol' trees an' when de sap gits to runnin', you gashes 'um deep an' saves de juice—jes' like cuttin' de tar out of de turkentine tree. By an' by you has automobeel tires that sells as high as fifty dollahs apiece. Same way wid a golf ball orchard. Only a man ain't pestered wid savin' de sap. All he do is plant de trees an' stand back whilst nature takes its course. De tree busts out wid flowers an' when de flowers fades de li'l golf balls is budded. Two or three weeks lateh, in dis hot climate, de fust crop of golf balls is ready to pick.

You picks 'em, sorts 'um by sizes, an' paints 'em white. Dah you is! Dey sells fo' a dollah apiece same as full quarts of likker in de good ol' days."

The mention of liquor was Sap Kerrfew's cue to produce another trio of avalanche cocktails.

While the host was absent, Festus King improved his opportunity. "De leadin' thing I'se got is a small golf ball orchard out de road heah a piece. Got me ten acres an' de trees is all bearin' noble. Fust crop gits ripe next month. Dem trees has more dan a hun'ded golf balls apiece hangin' on 'em right now—ripenin' day an' night. Figger how much money dat means!"

"Sho' do!" The Wildcat's fading intellect fumbled with a problem wherein a hundred was divided by twelve and the quotient multiplied by the price of a dozen golf balls. "Sho' runs into big money, Festus. How many acres is you got?"

"Got me ten acres. Soon as Sap gits back heah wid dat likker, us gits in my high-powered auto'beel an' I shows you a night-bloomin' gold mine."

Thirty minutes later, the Wildcat, under the guidance of Festus King, stepped out of an automobile which the promoter parked beside a grove of olive trees five miles out of Los Angeles.

"Step oveh heah, Wilecat, an' feel dese golf balls," the enthusiast invited. "Neveh wuz a finer crop no place. See 'em shine in de moonlight! Dey is a li'l oval now but when dey gits full-growed dey roun's out—like a pumpkin. Den all you does is shake de bush, dip whut falls in white paint, an' sell de finished

product to folks whut plays golf. Ev'ry one means a dollah. See how many dollahs kin you count in de moonlight f'm whah you stands."

The Wildcat lifted his wavering eyes and counted as high as seven. "Festus, I sees mo' dan a million! You sho' is lucky havin' all dis land."

"Wilecat, when I'se lucky my friends is lucky! You'se my friend. De least I kin do fo' a boy whut fit an' bled in de A.E.F., holding of dem German boys, is to spread de good luck roun' till he ketches holt. Fo' two hund'ed dollahs, to pervent any hard feelin's, I sells you two full acres of dis heah golf ball orchard. Dey runs ennyhow a hund'ed trees to de acre. Figger out whut dat means next month when dis golf orchard gits ripe!"

"Festus, I sho' 'preciates bein' yo' fren'." The Wildcat fell hard. "Write out de sale papeh. Heah's yo' money! Count it an' see is it right." The purchaser, plunging onward to the land of ease, handed over his roll, uncounted, to his new benefactor.

CHAPTER XIV

FESTUS KING riffled the roll of currency. "Zactly right, Wilecat! Us gits back to town now an' writes out de papeh. Does you crave to have it in yo' name or in yo' wife's name?"

"Ain't got no wife. Ain't got nobody 'cept my ol' podneh Demmy an' my mascot goat. Sho' be glad when de money rolls in an' I kin boon Demmy wid a million dollahs."

"Like to meet yo' podneh some day," Festus King returned.

"You sho' meet up wid dat boy! I got to git back now an' see how is he gittin' along."

The Wildcat got back, but midway of the return ride, fighting a losing battle against the alcohol and ether, he fell into a sleep which tapered off more than twelve hours later.

The awakening found him stretched full-length on a wooden bench, between the curbing and the sidewalk, a long way out on Santa Monica Boulevard.

He closed his eyes against the stabbing sunlight and rolled over to shade his face from the brilliant glare. He rolled off the bench and the fall backward awakened him to the painful realities of life. He sat up against the bench. "Seems like I been

a-dreamin'." He reached in his pockets, searching for his bank-roll, but beyond the five-dollar bill which he had received in change along with the quart of bootleg gin his pockets were empty. "Sho' ain't no dream whut takes yo' money an' leaves you bust. Starts last night wid money, lookin' fo' gin, an' winds up belly-deep in hell. Us betteh git back to whah at Demmy is an' git him pacified so I kin tell him how come dis meetin' wid Old Man Trouble."

The problem of pacifying Demmy proved to be less difficult than the Wildcat anticipated, largely by reason of the fact that Demmy credited the tale which the Wildcat related about his purchase of a golf ball orchard to the usual effects of the bootleg gin which the investor had consumed.

"Wilecat, you neveh bought no real estate—all you buys wid yo' likker is de fringes of delirium tremblin'. You'se dreamin' big on whut you says wuz one bottle. De plain truth is you gits yo' gin an' gits licked in yo' ruckus wid de Demon Rum. Next thing you knows, you wakes up on a bench. Dat's plain 'nuff."

"Naw-suh, Demmy! Between when I buys de gin an' when I wakes up, somewhah 'long de line I 'vests my money—else how come I ain't got it now?"

"Somebody cleaned you whilst you wuz sleepin'."

"I tells you no. You come 'long wid me to whah I gits dat gin—I kin find de place, an' when I meets up wid de man he tells you all about dis golf ball orchard whut I buys."

"Dah you goes! You sounds crazy in de fust

place. Golf balls ain't growed on no trees. I goes wid you. Come 'long heah an' let de man speak his piece. Only way to git de question proved is fo' somebody besides me to tell you. You is gittin' so you neveh believes me no mo'. Come 'long heah till us finds de man."

Five minutes later the pair left the Old Home Rooming-House and in their wake, trailing at the end of a piece of heavy string, marched the Wildcat's mascot goat.

At the Shady Rest the Wildcat had no difficulty in locating Sap Kerrfew. He introduced Demmy to the proprietor of the place. "Sap, dis sawed-off boy is a trial to my soul. Dis mawnin' when I wakes up I tells him 'bout de golf orchard whut I buys yestiddy f'm dat boy whut I meets an' he tells me I'se dreamin'."

Over Sap Kerrfew's eyes fell the glazed film that veils the eyes of a dead fish. "Tell me about it, Wilecat. Ain't heard nuthin' whut you did."

"Ain't nuthin' to tell—'ceptin' I buys a golf ball orchard."

"Whah at dis place?"

"Kain't jes' say, 'ceptin' I meets de man heah whut I buys it f'm."

"Naw-suh, Wilecat! You didn't meet no real estate man roun' dis place. Dis heah Shady Rest ain't no office—all whut goes on in dis place is a li'l drinkin' an' now an' den a li'l gamblin' in de back room."

The Wildcat's interest quickened at the mention

of the second activity and in his mind was born a scheme whereby the losses of the previous night might be offset with the gambling proceeds which might come with Lady Luck's smile.

"Whut kind of gam'lin'?" he asked.

"Pasteboard an' bone. Gin'rally, fo' folks whut craves action, us unhitches de gallopers an' lets 'em prance."

"Sap, dat's me! Unhitch yo' gallopers. I craves to build up!"

Sap Kerrfew reached in his pocket and hauled out a pair of dice which up to date had been fatal to all comers. "Heah you is! Come in de back room an' speak yo' piece!"

The Wildcat retrievd his lone five-dollar bill and handed it to Sap Kerrfew. "Gimme change fo' dis, boy. I aims to dribble to my doom in case Lady Luck is deaf, but befo' I does I knocks five times on dat woman's front do'!"

Sap Kerrfew handed the Wildcat five silver dollars in exchange for the bank note, and then in the gambling-pasture of the Shady Rest the Wildcat knelt down and began his devotions to Lady Luck, weaving through the preliminary calisthenics of the ritual of supplication before the Shrine of Chance. "Sap, I shoots a dollah! Shower down yo' opposition whilst dese grazin' cubes climbs de tree whah at de big green-money leaves is wavin'! I'se a fast black an' I craves to be faded."

The enemy showered down a dollar which fell, eagle side up, beside the Wildcat's bet.

"Bird of freedom, I sets you free! Fly back to de home nest wid yo' twin. Ice dice, freeze dis dollah to my hand. Gin cubes, whut proof is you? Wham! An' de black spots proves e-o-leven! Sap, de luck judge fines you a dollah. Shoots de two dollahs! Shower down, devil, whilst yo' pussonal weapons helps me build up."

Sap Kerrfew showered down. "Plain accident," he reflected. "Nobody kin control dem taper dice. Wid de next gallop dis boy lands in de mis'ry slough an' suicides hisself financial."

Upon the inert dice, nestling close between the fingers and thumb of his left hand, the Wildcat breathed the hot breath of life. "Bone babies, warm up an' git active! Fo' dollahs baits de hook! Breakfast cubes, set de table. Burglar bones, fo' dollahs in de safe—on yo' way! Wham! an' de jitney twins is on de top when de rollin' bones decides to stop!"

It appeared that Sap Kerrfew's prediction covering the Wildcat's financial suicide had been temporarily contradicted.

The visitor, steaming himself back to normalcy, and beginning to sense the presence of Lady Luck, swept a kindly gesture toward the four dollars which lay before him. "Fo' lady aces wid de pretty faces! Aces, repose whah at you is till us sees does enny boy by de name of Sap own yo' twins! Shower down, Sap! De dollah quartet is waitin' fo' dey accompaniment. Dat's it! De mo' you puts out, de mo' I takes in. Fo' an' fo' on de floor! Quartette dollahs, whut shall de harvest be? Sickle dice, hold yo'

edge whilst I reaps dem eight-dollah sheaves! Razor-back babies, root yo' acorns! Lady Luck, stand by me whilst de spots is uprisin'! Whuff! an' Sap an' de judge says shoot de eight. Meet me halfway wid yo' peace-offerin' whilst dese pork dice gits fat."

"You is met, luck hound! Fades de eight dollahs. Roll 'em! An' does you break yo' arm, I regrets it ain't yo' neck!"

"Lily, stand by me an' aim yo' horns at Ol' Man Trouble! Dixie dice, I craves eight dollahs wid seven spots. Wham! an' welcome home li'l fo'-tray! De speckled quartet—'longside of faith, hope an' charity. Shoots de sixteen. Fade me whilst de fa'in' cost money. I'se a fast-passin' fool an' I'se headin' back fo' de next pass. Dat's it! Three five-dollah bills an' one slug. Dice, sixteen dollahs face you twice! Sixteen means six an' one. See kin you read yo' lesson! Sugar babies! Sweet sixteen! Wham—an' I sees de six an' I sees de teen-y ace! Drags down two dollahs to even de books an' I shoots de thirty. Shower down thirty. 'Thirty days,' said de judge. 'Thirty dollahs,' sez me. Thirty days hath September, an' thirty dollahs has me!"

Sap Kerrfew began to suspect that his taper dice might have loaned some of their magic to the Wildcat's eager fingers.

"Nobody neveh made no steady-runnin' passes like dis wid dem bones," he reflected. He consoled himself with the thought that somewhere along the line the seven-pass fool would fall and break his financial

neck. But the basis for his consolation was as false as the dice which he had provided for the Wildcat's undoing.

The Wildcat, working faster now, massaged Lily's bony forehead with the two dice while he voiced his impatient invitation to his opponent. "I'se dirty wid thirty! Sap, see kin you clean me! Shower down whilst de luck rain is fallin'! I'se in de rain an' I'se gittin' wet. Me an' Lily aims to swim whilst you stays high an' dry. Donate de thirty, boy, whilst dese jocky cubes rides to win!"

"Looks like a good day for miracles," Sap Kerrfew protested. He faded the Wildcat thirty dollars.

"You keep de miracles whilst I keeps de spots. Lady Luck, as you wus! Lily, stand by me!" The Wildcat rubbed the dice against his mascot's left ear. "Dis time, clickers, make it quick an' painless. Electric cubes, telegraph yo' baby on de way—an' de message reads six an' five! Who's dat gallopin' away? Ol' Man Trouble! Us is chased him sixty miles. Sixty miles at a dollah a mile, an' us shoots it all. High dice, oveh de falls! Fade me, Sap, an' set steady whilst de show goes on."

The loser, leaning heavily on his theory that nothing could last forever, counted out six ten-dollar bills and added them to the money which had accumulated in the center of the arena.

Again the Wildcat breathed the breath of life into the twin cubes, "Hund'ed an' twenty—an' flyin' high! Balloon dice, ooze 'long way up whah folks kin see you!"

The Wildcat took a long chance and from his hand the dice leaped upward and came to rest behind him. He had trusted to his own technique until the tips of his fingers were beginning to lose the exquisite sensitiveness that rendered feasible his miracles of control. Now he trusted all to Lady Luck, and when the dice had been thrown he twisted around quickly and read the inscription on their upturned faces.

"Hot dam, Sap! Us is still drinkin' f'm de spigot of de barrel whah de luck gin is splashin' 'round. I reads me three an' fo'! Three an' fo'—dat means one mo'. Shoots de hund'ed-twenty. Hund'ed an' twenty dollahs! Fade me, an' I makes de mile in two-fo'ty!"

Sap Kerrfew walked out of the back room of his establishment and deprived the cash register of enough money to bring his personally conducted roll to a sum that would equal the Wildcat's bet. He walked back to where the Wildcat awaited him. "Heah's yo' money an' I makes a side bet of a million dat dis time you breaks yo' record, 'cause if you don't de chances is I breaks yo' neck an' robs de body."

"Sap, you sounds like suicide. Speckle babies, sixty miles fo' times! Ramble whilst de gamblin'-privilege is yours. Two-fo'ty craves his new king. Two hund'ed an' fo'ty, I skins you alive. Tell me suicide? Battle dice, de big guns is boomin'! Bam! An' whut does de li'l bugle say? I heard de mess call! Li'l bugle sez soupy soupy. I sees de ol' cap'n wid six lootenants. Six-ace! Hot dam, Sap! If you calls dat suicide, all I regrets is I lives jes' one

life at a time. Two-fo'ty, still alive! Sell de roof off yo' house an' us runs de trial whilst Lady Luck sets down in de judge's chair."

The loser, in now up to his neck, and enjoying increasing delusions relative to the ultimate break of a run of what he called "luck," was absent long enough to rob his own faro bank. He came back with enough money to meet the Wildcat midway on the field of battle.

"Dat's it, Sap! Shower down yo' two-fo'ty. I sez you is a indo' spo't! Wuz you outdoors, you could feel de same joy by buttin' yo' haid against a brick wall—same thing as fadin' me! R'ar back an' ram de wall whilst I lets dese dynamite cubes do my ragin' roun'. Bonehead babies, I 'nounces my last strive. You faces fo'-eighty. Ham-bone babies, drip yo' nutrifyin' gravy! Fo' hund'ed an' eighty dollahs. Dynamite devils, I has breathed yo' hot to de bustin'-point, an' when you busts—Bam! Ain't nuthin' left but 'leven spots! Six an' a five! I'se still alive, an' I'se done!"

The victor got to his feet and pocketed his cash. He handed the dice to the defeated proprietor of the Shady Rest, mingling his words of gratitude with his farewell. "Sap, me an' Demmy an' Lily sho' is much obliged fo' dis gamblin'-privilege. Us sho' feels booned noble wid dese winnin's. Dey evens me up, wid plenty to spare, on whut I 'vested in dat midnight golf ball dream. Come 'long, Demmy! Git goin', Lily! Us travels befo' somebody steals de silveh linin' out of dis cloud of luck."

CHAPTER XV

THE silver lining in the cloud of luck which hung over the Wildcat and Demmy thinned rapidly under the corrosive action of gin and joy. Presently, when they were broke, Demmy decided to stage his future activities in some section of his home territory. Police folks craved to ask him embarrassing questions about a Los Angeles employer who had operated an outdoor automobile garage from which several cars had been lost. Innocent of any connection with the theft, Demmy realized nevertheless that the less traffic he had with the law, the more time he might have for the normal things of a life leading onward and upward to the peaks of success swept by the sunshine of Lady Luck's smile. "Say no mo', Wilecat, my mind is sot. Ennybody from now on whut knows Vicksburg an' dat country kin tell you whah at I is. I travels extry wid one of dese Eastbound convention Pullmans an' when I gits to Mississip', dere's whar I quits my job an' takes root."

"As you craves to, you does, bullhead. Me an Lily gits along noble in dis Lost Anxious town carryin' de tools fo' dese golf-playin' folks whar de sun shines bright mos' all de time."

Well enough for the steady sunshine, but mighty soon after Demmy had left him the Wildcat began to

figure that enough is enough. Variety is the spice of life and he began to crave spice.

His definition of spice, outlined in long orations to his mascot goat, included persimmons, yams, hog-killin' time, the first frost, drizzling rains, wild turkey trotting the ridges, shellbark hickory nuts, muscadines, pawpaws, religious revivals, steamboat rides and the mystery of midnight hunting-expeditions.

"Huntin' anything, goat, makes no diff'runce whut you starts out fo', whetheh you is got a lantern or not, you gin'ally meets up wid sumpin'. Mebbe it ain't no mo' dan a baptize f'm de lef' barrel of some hen-house gun. Don't make no diff'runce whut it is. Sho' be betteh dan de same ol' sunshine day in an' day out whut dey has in dis Los' Anxious country. Trouble is us ain't los' an' is anxious. I craves me a earthquake o' a cyclone whut kin move me o' de ground till I opens my eyes somewhah in de South whah at ol' Demmy is. Ask me an' I tells you one nigger sez dat's whah at ev'rythin' is."

Lily voiced a bleat of sympathy.

"Dere you is, goat—bellerin' like a ol' steam ingine! Don't do me no good to mention dis railroad bizness. All I'se 'quipped wid is two hind laigs whut is wore plum' stubby f'm marchin' roun' an' roun' wid dese golf-playin' white folks. I'se bore up under golf tools fur 'nuff fo' dese ball-beatin' folks to reach f'm heah to Memphis an' back. Whut did it git me, goat, I ax you?"

"Blaa-a!"

"You sez right! Nuthin' but blaa-a, wid mebbe a

fo'-dollah prize on steady days. Kain't do nuthin' wid fo' dollahs. Dis heah golf hardly makes us a livin', let alone railroad-ridin' money. Dey ain't no boat ennywhah near whut a boy kin git a rouster's job on like he kin in San Framcisco. Ain't nuthin' but de same thing oveh an' oveh an' oveh. Wish ol' Demmy wuz heah. Wish Lady Luck would rally roun' an' slap a ear toward dis los' child's moan."

The Wildcat's moan was interrupted by a summons from one of the golf-playing quartette of business men who craved action. The victim of too much sunshine and of Lady Luck's neglect tied his mascot goat to a fence post near the caddy house and walked over toward his potential employer.

"Boy, can you carry double?"

The Wildcat did not like the "Boy" business any too well, but it did not affect the gentleness of his reply. "Cap'n, yas-suh! My strength is come back so fur dat did I crave to, de chances is I could carry trupple or quipple."

At the seventh green the foursome developed a previously unsuspected golf lawyer in its midst and forthwith it became a quarrelsome.

"Dat's dis doggone yaller sunshine beatin' in on dese white folks' brains. Neveh seed such place fo' argufyin' talk. Dese white boys mebbe runs banks or groceries and owns auto'beels and buys dey bootleg by de case, but turn 'em loose in dis sun-dried golf orchard an' befo' dey plays half a game de wah is broke out. 'Bout de only way dey stays peaceful in de hot sun is when dey chokes down de battle-cry

wid gin. Enny ol' store bizness boy gits plum sweetened up wid mebbe six drinks. . . . Sho' wisht I wuz back in de Memphis country whah de ruckus-cravin' white folks uses cold talk an' hot lead 'stead of so much hot language."

The Wildcat held fast to his southbound ambition and dragged along until the eighteen holes were played, not knowing that his last prayer to Lady Luck had reached the compassionate heart of his unseen deity.

When the game was done, one of the bankers, grumbling a little at his luck, ordered the Wildcat to be at an appointed rendezvous at one o'clock on the following day. "I want you to caddy for a gentleman that is coming in from your part of the country. We're going to play a foursome at the Midwick—you be here at one o'clock to-morrow and we'll get you."

"Cap'n, yas-suh! Sho' will! Us an' Lily stands hitched whah at us is till you comes rollin' by."

On the following day the foursome showed up at two o'clock.

As far as the Wildcat could observe with half a dozen sidelong glances, the two passengers in the first long nickel-plated touring-car were fairly well organized to defeat any long-distance hootch-handlers. "Chances is it's dis heah hot weatheh whut has delapitated dese white folks."

In the second car, not quite so delapitated, was the gentleman from Memphis for whom the Wildcat was to caddy.

The Wildcat boosted the mascot goat into place beside the driver of the second car and climbed in. From subsequent scraps of conversation it appeared that the Memphis gentleman was attending an important conference of white folks who ruled an' reg'lated de Fed'ral Preserve Bank. "Dese folks is prolly dem bank boys whut buys all de fruit farms an' makes dem yaller orange preserve."

All of these idle and inaccurate speculations came to an end a mile or so beyond the point where the party had picked up the Wildcat when on the way to the Midwick Club the first car halted alongside of a high wire fence behind which paraded half a dozen scraggly-looking ostriches.

It developed that a genius in the first car had collided with the idea that an ostrich would be a handy thing for a sterling citizen to have around the house. The quartette of financial leaders got out of their cars and rallied around a pint flask of beaten gold. With the second slug, one of the mental giants broadcast a mental estimate of the earning-capacity of a heavy-set plume-bearing ostrich.

"No telling how much the son of a gun would save in the household budget for you, Steve. Here you have two lovely daughters and a young-looking wife who still craves to adorn herself with plumage the same as mine does. No American home should be without its ostrich. Figure ten million homes saving a hundred dollars a year on ostrich plumes alone—that's a billion dollars. Figger how many ostrich eggs you could buy for a billion dollars and what you

could hatch out of them. Looks to me like we're responsible for all of this bunk about woman's extravagance. Why didn't somebody think of it before? Here we're criticising the lovely ladies for spending money hand over hand and never doing a thing in a practical way to relieve their distress."

"He's right a million—and furthermore what I mean is when this delayed golf game begins we plays for ball, ball and ball plus one full-blooded feather-bearing ostrich for the low man. Gimme that flask!"

The flask gurgled its farewell for the third and last time and its requiem was a suggestion from one of the ostrich enthusiasts that the impending golf game be postponed long enough to include a detour to a filling-station where the life-giving qualities of the hammered gold flask might be revived. When the returns were counted, it was discovered that the flask had won by a thirsty neck, and so, waving coyly at an inquisitive buck ostrich which had come over to the fence to see what it was all about, the quartette mounted their chariots and headed for the new oasis, where in the sanctuary of the locker room four lives were saved.

Back then to the ostrich farm for another inspection of the prospective prize.

The golf game began at five o'clock.

Driving off at the first tee, the first player kept his eye on the ball. He continued to keep his eye on the ball. He essayed two or three preliminary waggles with his driver and then, grinning cheerfully, he lifted his head and addressed his companions,

"Keep the head down and blood runs to the head. Nourishes the brain. Brain gits filled with big ideas. Ideas bigger than ostrich eggs. Brain's all cluttered up with ideas, bigger than os'rich eggs. Can any gentleman multiply by eighteen?"

"Drive off, you damn orator, it's getting late!"

"There you are! What'll the newspapers say? Look at the headlines—'Gush of ideas checked by prominent banker.' I agree it is getting late—any wrist watch knows that. It's getting late an' this foursome is a tiresome boresome, so if anybody here can multiply by eighteen, I proposes we plays one hole for the Southern California Household Ostrich Championship. Multiply by eighteen and retreat back to the bright lights 's far 's my humble homestead with the winner of the match leading his prize."

The Wildcat, not quite knowing what it was all about and yet sensing some impending irregularities which were to fracture the ancient and honorable shades of Saint Andrews, rolled his eyes in anticipation at the spoken cheers which greeted the orator's suggestion.

Each member of the foursome drove off for distances varying from three to twenty yards.

There followed a flock of snake-killing iron shots and out of the rough, zigzagging across the fairway with a group of eights and tens, the foursome rallied on the green with two seventeens, a twenty-one and a twenty-three.

The Memphis man holed his ball with his twenty-seventh audited stroke. He was followed by a per-

fect thirty-six, a forty, and a forty-nine. "It's too much. Nobody can multiply eighteen by forty-nine."

"Nobody has to. Gimme plenty paper and I'll multiply anything once. Let's get this down. There's big money involved and you'll remember your early battles with bank-examiners. Gimme them figures. I give any leading banker in our midst a gold pencil for something I can write with."

In the gathering darkness four financial giants bowed their heads over the problem of multiplying eighteen by twenty-seven.

"Seven times eight is forty-nine where I come from."

"And ten off for cash."

"Seven times eight's sixty-five, 's anyone knows."

Seven times eight got lost in a fog and they turned to the Wildcat for arithmetical advice.

"Cap'n, suh, I neveh learned my numbehs 'ceptin' as high as six spots—dat's as fur as de dice goes. I'se learned up to twelve an' dere I quits, 'ceptin' to add."

For a moment it looked like seven times eight was insoluble, until one of the contestants found a way out of the jungle of figures.

"Gimme that pencil. Gimme them paper. Hold your hand tight over my left eye. Then turn me loose. It ain't seven times eight—it's eight times seven. Put down a six and carry a five. Two times eight and five is twenty. Put down a seven. Put

down a two. Add 'em up. Simple as can be. Two twenty-seven. There you are! Always was good with figures when I could see them."

"Old Memphis Steve wins the Household Ostrich with a snappy two twenty-seven!"

The Dixie guest smiled his gratification at his victory. "Add these digits two and two and seven, and view a lucky 'leven. Where I come from, the land is famous for its likker and its 'levens. Lead me to my prize!"

They led him to his prize and, at five minutes to six, negotiations were completed for the purchase of one male ostrich, seven feet high, weighing a little over two hundred pounds and equipped with the devil's own temper and three feather dusters.

With one of his assistants the proprietor of the ostrich farm spent five minutes in lashing a pair of restricting hobbles around the ostrich's legs close to his feet. When this had been done, the new owner of the ostrich pointed to the Wildcat.

"Let this boy lead him. He looks like he knew all about animals."

"Sho' does. Dey's animal blood in me. Us leads dis heah os'rich an' if he holds back us stretches his neck so f'r dat when it pulls in two it flies back and knocks him foolish. Ol' os'rich ain't nuthin' but de feather-bearin' front half of a ol' circus giraffe ennyhow. Plain mule blood—an' us rules mules."

When the parade started, the leading job developed into a holding-back effort, but after a while

when reason came to the trotting bird he ambled along beside the second automobile at a twelve-mile gait in spite of his embarrassing hobbles.

At the edge of town the leading citizens in the two automobiles began to realize some of the attendant possibilities of having their march observed. A quick council followed and a new line of march was laid.

The leading automobile headed straight for Union Station, where half an hour later the Wildcat and Lily and the plume-bearing ostrich were delivered to the tender mercies of an express agent.

Then, before the Wildcat quite realized what was going on, a roll of currency was thrust into his hand and his ears were all cluttered up with instructions. "Deliver him to my King Street house in Memphis. Transfer to an Anchor Line packet in New Orleans. Keep that ostrich fed and bedded down and protected against whatever cold weather you strike."

"Cap'n, yas-suh! Deliveh him an' bed him down."

"And don't bust his long feathers."

"Naw-suh! When us beds him down, us shelters his regalia. Sho' is adorned wid feathers like a Soopreem Leadin' Knight 'ceptin' de sword."

"He don't need any sword. He's got a kick like six mules."

"Yas-suh! Kain't do much kickin' wid dem rope handcuffs on his feet. Us feeds him alfalfa like you said. Us weeds out dem feathers de bes' us kin. Chances is when he gits cultivated right an' raked, dem feathers blooms out so thick dat you kain't find

de los' os'rich inside of him no mo' dan you kin find one of dese hairless dawgs in a load of hay."

The Wildcat said farewell to the white folks and at eight o'clock that night, engaging the aid of one of the express messengers in the car, he managed to throw the ostrich into a recumbent position calculated to afford the ungainly bird a maximum of comfort.

Immediately thereafter Lily, the mascot goat, sensing the end of the day's activities, curled up beside her new companion.

The Wildcat spread a borrowed blanket over the pair and with the ostrich's halter wrapped around his own wrist he pillowed his head against an outstanding clump of wing feathers and began sleeping himself Memphis-bound to the cadence of the clanking of the car.

CHAPTER XVI

AT nine o'clock on the first night of the Memphis-bound journey of the trio, the Wildcat was the only one asleep.

The change of scene and the unaccustomed quarters had so excited the nervous system of the ostrich that the bird began an angry hissing to relieve its overcharged nerves.

Warm and comfortable under the blanket, Lily awakened and realized that she was hungry.

One of the mascot's first principles in the technique of obtaining nutriment was to eat whatever was handy, wherever it was, and accordingly the goat grazed for a while on the nutriment nearest at hand, which happened to be the plumage on the starboard wing of the ostrich.

Feathers are not equipped with nerves, and all went well at the feather lunch counter until the goat began nipping pin-feathers close to the awkward bird's epidermis, at which moment under the blanket there began a miniature earthquake which required the combined efforts of the Wildcat and the two express messengers to subdue.

When the smoke of battle cleared away and until midnight the Wildcat laid himself down between his

two charges resolved not to let nothing detain him loose from no sleep.

Now, with her appetite still unsatisfied and with a feather lunch counter beyond her reach, Lily devoted herself to the convenient business of eating away a large section of the Wildcat's left sleeve.

At dawn, when the damage was discovered the Wildcat addressed a promise of revenge toward his two-legged charge. "De white folks sez you eats ennything. Us sez you reaches enny place wid dat long neck, but leave me tell you one thing, Ella—one mo' meal off of my pussonal raiment an' it's yo' funeral banquit."

Ella the ostrich looked chagrined, but said nothing, while with her conscience crimping under the knowledge of her own guilt Lily the mascot goat hung her head and looked sideways.

"Where did he git the name 'Ella'?" One of the baggagemen evidenced his curiosity at the Wildcat's method of addressing the ostrich.

"Ol' os'rich belongs to de animal kingdom 'spite of de vegetable leaves whut crops out on him. Biggest animal in de animal kingdom is de el'phant. Dat's how come us calls dis boy 'Ella'—short fo' el'phant."

He turned again to his hobbled captive. "Uncoil dat neck whilst us 'ranges you like de white folks said befo' you 'cumulates dis heah gluemonia whut sticks in yo' throat."

The Wildcat began wrapping a pair of spiral puttees about the long neck of the ostrich. When the bird's respiratory canals were insulated, obeying his

general instructions and realizing that Ella was a delicate bird, and that the cool weather was apt to ruin him, the Wildcat summoned his two white companions to assist him in the business of adorning the awkward creature with a heavy pair of discarded pants.

Across Ella's back the Wildcat arranged a complicated system of string suspenders, and then, with the addition of an old canvas hunting-coat which he had purchased for the purpose at a second-hand store near Union Station, Ella's protective costume was complete.

Again the hobbles were fastened around the big bird's feet, and now, with his charge safe from the variable temperatures of the car, the Wildcat laughed his scorn at whatever variable weather might await him.

Thereafter, until the Wildcat accompanied by Lily and Ella went ashore at New Orleans, the trip was without incident.

The Wildcat prowled his way through the streets of New Orleans, asking questions every block to enable varying groups of brunette bystanders to accumulate a full idea of his importance, until finally he came to the warehouse near which, swinging on her lines, lay the up-river packet which was to convey him and the menagerie over the last leg of their journey.

"Whut makes dat big varmint walk so delicate?" The question came from an inquisitor of the Wildcat's own color. "Turn him upside down an' leave him hop along on his neck an' he makes mo' speed."

"Boy, speed ain't no object," the Wildcat rallied to Ella's defense.

"Turn him upside down an' he looks like a one-legged bird wid two necks. Whut you call dat circus-looking kangaroot thing?"

A chocolate-faced witness, hitherto silent, answered the casual query.

"Dat ain't no kangaroot—ain't seen him set none, is you? Dese kangaroots is like dem wah aviatin' boys—all de time flyin' or else settin' down. Dis heah brute walks."

"Ain't seen him do no walkin' to brag about yit," the skeptic called to the Wildcat. "Unadorn dem britches off dat half-giraffe an' see kin he walk."

"Us ain't deprivin' dis Ella loose f'm no raiment. Dese animals is delicate an' till Ella gits climate-broke whilst he stan's 'round cold, dis raiment stays whah at it is."

Although the Wildcat was deliberate in neglecting the suggestion concerning Ella's clothes, it nevertheless inspired him to loosen the hobbles from around the awkward bird's feet so that Ella might enjoy greater freedom in his strides.

The idea was a good one as far as results went, because no sooner were the hobbles loosened than the aggravated ostrich showed his mule blood in one well-directed kick which landed on the Wildcat's centre of gravity, and then, trotting gracefully through the fringe of spectators, Ella started down the interior of the long pier.

The Wildcat recovered himself, got to his feet, and led a platoon of pursuers whose secondary object was to stay as far from Ella's kicking ability as they could without losing front seats at the big ruckus involved in Ella's capture.

At a distant corner of the pier the bird was penned in by fifty excited members of the Wildcat's race, none of whom ventured across an imaginary deadline drawn within twenty feet of the hissing ostrich.

Yells of encouragement showered down on the Wildcat's eardrums. "Leap in an' clomp him 'roun' both laigs!"

"Don't aim to clomp no mule legs whilst my brain is right."

"Git a rope an' noose his neck."

"Ain't de neck part whut I dreads."

At the apex of disaster, unnoticed for the time being by the excited crowd, Lily the mascot goat edged her way along until she flanked the enemy whose kick had preceded her master's somersault. Then the shadowed corner of the pier was lightened by a gray streak of galloping goat and a moment later one feather-bearing Ella lay prone on his side where his legs had been butted out from under him by the bleating victor of the engagement.

Before Ella could struggle to his feet, he was again festooned with the constricting hobbles, and then the hissing bird suffered the chagrin of seeing his four-legged companion showered with the applause which should have greeted his victory over the Wildcat.

"Yas-suh! Us sez you is right. Enny time Ol'

Man Trouble ketches up wid me, I leaves it all to Lady Luck an' Lily. Dat mascot is 'ranged me loose f'm grief mo' times dan snake eyes shows in a revival-meetin' recess."

"Who dat snake-eye talkin' boy?" A newcomer who had joined the edge of the group, towering above his companions, addressed the inquiry to whoever might hear.

The Wildcat answered. "Dat's me. You axes me an' I tells you. Neveh handled none myself much, bein' mos'ly cluttered wid sevens an' 'levens, but I'se seed big niggers plumb freckled wid snake eyes when de bones begin rollin'."

A tone of challenge was in the Wildcat's voice.

It got results.

A moment later, back of a bulwark of cotton bales in the opposite corner of the pier shed, the Wildcat, with Lily and Ella beside him, fumbled into his pocket after the remains of the expense money which had been provided for his journey. He counted it over quickly and then told the listening world where at he stood. "Hund'ed an' some dollars craves action! Big Boy wid de big mouth, see kin you let de gallopers orate dis snake-eye talk whut clogs yo' teeth so heavy."

"Gimme dem dice!" Big Boy grabbed a pair of dice extended to him by one of his companions. From the moist pocket of his overalls he retrieved a ten-dollar bill.

"Dere you is, os'rich-tender! Shoots ten dollahs fo' de mornin' gun!"

"Fire an' fall back! Big Boy, you is faded!" The Wildcat dribbled a twenty-dollar bill out of his roll and picked up the ten dollars which Big Boy had staked.

Big Boy, warming the cold ivories, shampooed the cubes against his kinky hair for ten seconds and then he launched a leaping nine-spot into action one second ahead of the helping groan which bulged from his deflating chest. "Nona f'm Boston! Craves me de twin lady fo' Nona! Wham—damn dat woman!"

"Seven, an' dere you is! You claims big an' rolls small. Whut I tell you?" The Wildcat picked up the dice. "Gimme room! I lets de same twenty lay. Shoots de twenty!"

Big Boy dug up a twenty-dollar bill. "Roll 'em! Kain't be no retreat widout a battle. See is yo' snake eyes mates!"

"Neveh seed no mates. Don't own me no snake eyes. Ain't addin' nuthin' to dis travelin' menagerie 'ceptin' frog-skin money whut de Big Boy donates. Dice, how much is de han'some size hat? Wham—an' I reads,—doggone!"

In a fringe of quick laughter, punctuated by Ella's hissing, the Wildcat read the fatal two-dot message.

Big Boy grunted and picked up one of the twenty-dollar bills. "Roll 'em, snake-charmer. You is a giant wid words."

The Wildcat slipped a bill out of his package of expense money and breathed upon the cubes a mouthful of bitter words. "Dere's de two snakes! F'm now on, de numbers jumps once an' lands on de bed-

rock seven. Sinful serpents, go blind till you sees de sunrise on seven. Three-time babies, you adds de three ways. Wham! . . . Doggone! Neveh seed bone disease so ragin'!"

"Snow-white 'ceptin' fo' two black specks! You is got de habit!" Big Boy picked up his second twenty dollars and encouraged the Wildcat to further effort along the losing line. "Retain yo' weapons whilst you works fo' me. Ev'ry move you makes is a picture an' ev'ry picture I sees sez twenty at both ends. Roll 'em!"

"Gimme time!" Wildcat stripped another bank note from his dwindling roll. "Dere you is! Shoots de twenty! Lady Luck, stand by me. Somebody choke dat hissin' varmint at my back."

Nobody reached up to choke Ella.

"Wid de las' time seven I gives you yo' chance. Lily an' Ella—six laigs an' a neck makes de prodigal seven! Wham—an' I reads , . . eight!"

Big Boy grunted. "You fo'got de goat's tail, whut makes eight. Roll 'em! Eight is yo' fate!"

"Fatal eight, repeat! Double quartette, sing yo' song! Baby bones—wham! . . . An' double damn!"

"Dere's yo' seven! Seems like sumpin' delayed it. Gimme dem dice!" Big Boy reached for the dice which the Wildcat passed over to him and then, smiling with confidence, he gestured grandly at the two twenty-dollar bills before him. "I leaves it lay. Os'rich-tender, dig down and dig up! Shoots de fo'ty!"

The Wildcat looked over his left shoulder at one

of his staring companions. "Choke off dat os'rich befo' he hisses me plumb to de po'house."

The brunette at the Wildcat's shoulder mumbled his objections. "Ain't gwine to choke off no hissin' mule!"

The Wildcat was too busy watching the faded forty to hear the objection.

Big Boy massaged the dice to blood heat between his wide palms and without verbal encouragement launched them on their way. Before the dice had stopped, he groaned a groan of triumph. "Whamph! De unsuspected number! E-o-leven. How come us neglected you? An' you so handy to have!" The winner drew down three-fourths of his prize and pouched it. "Leaves de twenty go to seed. Fade de twenty, os'rich cowboy, an' watch it grow!"

The Wildcat laid down his last twenty-dollar bill and then he scrambled to his feet and clutched the hissing Ella around the neck. He bent Ella's neck over until the hissing was muffled into a gargle. "Roll 'em quick whilst I has dis hoodoo bird calmed down."

"I rolls 'em quick!" Without moving his arm, Big Boy gave the dice a kick with the ends of his fingers. "Dere you is, quick-craver! Live five an' a spruce dooce! Chances is dat os'rich bird is innocent."

The Wildcat released Ella's neck and the big bird immediately renewed the persistent hissing. The loser picked up the ostrich's halter and festooned Lily's hanging head with a quick command. "Come

'long, goat! Come 'long, Ella! Praise de Lawd you is built noble fo' walkin' purposes. De white folks sez steamboat, but Lady Luck sez hind laigs. Us is Memphis-bound on foot—wid a long ways to go. Ella, wuz yo' twin wid you, I'd couple you wid balin'-wire an' ride you ragged."

Ella's twin being A.W.O.L. the Wildcat, dead broke and bowed low under his weight of woe, made his exit with a flourish of words and faced the first mile of the long and weary road to Memphis, Tenn-o-see.

CHAPTER XVII

AN hour or two after the menagerie started North, four gentlemen in Los Angeles took a vacation from their play long enough to realize that now and then life was real and life was earnest and that when the alcohol evaporated out of one variety of practical joke it left nothing but a horrible example of what the Demon Rum could do to a happy home with the aid of an ostrich.

"Maybe Frank can sidetrack that nigger in New Orleans."

"I've wired Frank and the Anchor Line people. They ought to round up that pair to-day sometime. Told 'em to spare no expense in heading off that ostrich. If that bird ever shows up at my house and if my wife ever begins asking that nigger questions, I'll have to come out here and change my name and live permanently with you maniacs. That's that."

At the moment the Wildcat was plodding along, herding his charge overland toward the country and nearing the outskirts of the town.

On the following day, well away from the city and clear of immediate capture by the local officials of the steamboat line, he began the old-time business of living off the country. Lily and Ella fared nobly, but after two or three days of intermittent rations the

Wildcat realized that what he needed most was either his white folks or a reckless friend who owned a grocery.

"Git 'long, goat! You makes me sick watchin' you thrive yo' stummick full of grass an' me loaded down wid a cravin' fo' meat vittles. Chances is, does dis inside tiger keep clawin' at my vitals, I barbecues you an' mourns yo' memory whilst I cannibalizes yo' remains. Git 'long out of my sight wid dat grass-eatin'. . . . Come 'long heah, Ella. You is almos' as bad as dat goat, only worse."

The Wildcat halted his two-legged charge long enough to adjust the string suspenders which upheld Ella's insulating pants. "Dawgone you, os'rich! Seems like ev'ry time you stoops oveh, you busts a string! Stand up straight an' bend wid yo' neck! Lawd knows you has neck 'nuff to eat off de top o' a railroad deepo, let alone de bottom of de ground you stan's on."

With Ella's protective raiment properly adjusted, the Wildcat resumed his march, prowling along without further interruption until late in the afternoon, and then, while his two charges grazed their heads off on the bountiful landscape, he foraged around and accumulated an armful of passable sugar cane and five or six yams which had missed the harvest.

He roasted the yams, and these, with an unending supply of sugar cane, furnished him his supper.

Up again in the chill of dawn he hazed his circus into action and to an accompaniment of Ella's hissing the new day's march began.

In the straightaway no speed records were broken with the three-mile gait, but, slow as his progress was, the Wildcat overtook a companion along around eleven o'clock in the person of a sawed-off cinnamon-faced youth who was covering lots of zigzag territory in a vain attempt to excite a walking turkey to greater speed.

When the Wildcat overtook the cinnamon-faced youth, he greeted him: "How is you an' whah at is you bound 'ceptin' sideways?"

"Middlin'. Whut dat varmint?"

The Wildcat scowled. "Neveh seed such a ignorant nigger. Dis varmint is de same as what you is trailin' on yo' string. Raised him f'm de egg."

"Whut does you feed him on?"

The Wildcat invented his replies as he went along. "Feeds him on dis California turkey seed. Sumpin' like oats, but you sees whut it does."

"Sho' do! . . . Is he got his growth?" The sawed-off nigger looked up at the seven-foot ostrich.

"Boy! Got his growth? Dat varmint is still in de cradle. I seed turkeys git so big eatin' dis California turkey seed, dey kain't drive 'em along de street 'count de trolley wires electro-ketchin' dey necks."

"Sho' is!" The sawed-off cinnamon-faced youth rolled his eyes in testimony of his belief in the Wildcat's statement.

"You knows el'phants?" The Wildcat fired the question at his companion.

"I'se seed some."

"Boy, you sez you knows el'phants. In California, whah at I'se roamed an' raged, dey has el'phants bigger dan enny you eveh seed. Feeds 'em on California el'phant seed. Whut I means, dey gits big! No matter how big dey gits, does a ol' el'phant git sick all dey does is drive him to de stable an' send fo' one of dese full-grown California turkeys. De turkey carries de sick el'phant back to de el'phant veterinary."

" 'Spect he does, but whut I kain't see is how does he pick him up?"

"Huh! You sho' is plain farm nigger. Dese California turkeys wrops dey neck 'roun' de ol' el'phant two or three times an' lifts him plumb off de ground. Dat's de way, field hand. When dey ain't workin' on el'phants, de railroad uses dese turkeys in train wrecks fo' liftin' cars back on de track—out whah I comes f'm, dat is."

The Wildcat felt his last statement would hold his companion for a while, and it did. It held the cinnamon-faced boy until the silence got monotonous, and then, "Whah at is you headed wid yo' li'l turkey?" the Wildcat asked.

"I'se headed fo' de fair at Black Bayou."

"How come fair?"

"Follerin' de revival. All de niggers in good standin' whut ain't backslid is congregatin' fo' de fair whut de Reverent Twilly Creed is organizin'. De wimmin folks shows off pies an' cakes, an' de men folks, 'ceptin' de share farmers, shows off whut dey is raised. Dey is hawg prizes an' han'some chillun

prizes an' prizes fo' de layin'est hens . . . slick mule prizes, turkey prizes, an' speedy dawgs."

"Whut dat turkey prize thing you sez?"

"I sez turkey prize. What I means is champeen Turkey gits fust prize."

"Dat's me!"

A look of dejection spread across the cinnamon-colored countenance of the Wildcat's companion. He jerked on the string which led to the right leg of the little turkey he was driving. "Gobbler, whoa back! Lemme talk dis oveh."

"Whut ails you?" The Wildcat looked at the halted one.

"Nuthin' ails me 'ceptin' I'se carryin' spare freight wid dis li'l turkey does you aim to enter dat California giant."

The Wildcat's decision was instantaneous. "Aims to, boy! Not only aims to but is!" And then a mood of sympathy for the defeated one came to him. "Come 'long an' race yo' gobbler," he advised. "Chances is you picks off second prize. Ev'rybody kain't have de fust prize."

The Wildcat's words pacified his companion and presently they were near the region where the fair was in progress.

On the way, with his companion enlisted to his plan, the Wildcat outlined a scheme calculated to eliminate the possibility of a hitch in his prize-capturing program.

"Dis is how us does, Shorty. You claims yo' friend Vitus Marsden is comin' wid his turkey.

Dat's me! You pays down de dollah fo' me which I gives you afteh de prize is won. I hides at the swamp edge whilst you 'ranges ev'rything, an' when you comes back an' tells me to haul out de champeen I hauls dis Ella turkey into de public view. Afteh dat, all us does is feel de prize money bulgin' in my hip pocket."

Shorty agreed to function in the prize-raiding plot, and while the Wildcat and Ella and Lily lay in the cypress country on the edge of Black Bayou, the prize-craver's agent entered the name of the unknown Vitus Marsden in the list of contestants for the turkey championship.

"Who dis Vitus Marsden? Neveh knowed about him farmin' in dese parts."

Shorty told the world who Vitus Marsden was. "Light-built spindlin' boy whut raises some turkey gobblers fo' market."

At the eleventh hour of the turkey-judging contest, down the pathway between the exhibit tents, threading their way through a milling mob of pop-eyed Negroes, the Wildcat led the light-stepping Ella.

"Lawd Gawd, whut dat varmint in dem human britches!"

"Out de way, niggers! Leave dis turkey walk through. Git dem chillun to one side befo' dis Ella turkey picks himself a chile! Stand back dere, woman, befo' dat boy you is leadin' gits to be a orphum."

At the entrance to the turkey tent, the Wildcat reached aloft and swung on Ella's neck. He bent the

ostrich's neck low enough to get Ella's hissing head on the halter; his prize-winner faced the judges.

"I is Vitus Marsden," he announced, "betteh known as de Wilecat. I raises turkeys some, an' heah is whut I interdooces to ketch de turkey prize at dis heah fair."

The judges leaned back and looked up at the Wildcat's turkey.

The Reverend Twilly Creed, chairman of the board of judges, nodded dejectedly at his two official companions and reached for his pocketbook. "Eighty-five, ninety, ninety-five, one hund'ed. Dere you is, Vitus Marsden. You wins by a neck an' by sev'ral otheh segments of turkey anatomy. Unclothe dat champeen an' leave us gaze at him in de flesh."

The Wildcat removed the hunting-coat from about Ella's chest, and with his pocket knife he slit the string suspenders that held up Ella's pants.

The Champion stood forth in all his majesty, while from about him lifted a chorus of wonderment and amazement.

The Wildcat bulged with his hundred-dollar prize. "California turkey seed is whut I feeds him on."

"Whah at dis seed? Is you got enny fo' sale?"

The Wildcat deliberately avoided an opportunity for reaping himself some tainted money. "Ain't got a speck. All whut I had I used raisin' dis champeen turkey."

For an hour the Wildcat enjoyed the limelight and gorged himself the while on adulation, ginger cookies, goobers and soda pop. Fed up, finally, he returned

to the tent where Ella the hobbled champion stood looking down upon the milling crowd of gabbling humanity and gobbling turkeys.

The Wildcat sought the Reverend Twilly Creed. "Rev'runt an' judge, I guess dat's all. Me an' dis champeen Ella got to git movin'. Too bad dey ain't no goat contest so us could git de meanness prize wid dis champeen Lily goat."

Lily, standing between the reverend judge and the Wildcat, bleated softly in recognition of her name and devoted herself to nibbling a mouthful of the Wildcat's coat sleeve.

"Whut you mean—gittin' back wid de champeen turkey? Ain't you learned de rules? All dese varmints, animals, cakes an' pies—ev'rythin' 'ceptin' de entries in de fat chillun contest becomes automatic de property o' de judges fo' defrayin' expense an' prize money."

About him the Wildcat saw a circle of gleaming eyeballs lighting with pleasure at observing his discomfiture.

He surrendered. "Rev'runt, take de turkey! Me an' Lily is glad dey wuz no goat contest."

He picked up Lily's leading-string. "Come 'long heah, goat!"

With Lily at his heels, the winner in the turkey contest faded into the gathering darkness of the late afternoon. "Come 'long, goat! Whut's one mo' o' less ol' Ella turkey ennyhow?"

At the entrance to the fair grounds the Wildcat was halted by a dusty motorcycle rider.

The rider asked the Wildcat three questions and handed him a folded yellow paper.

The Wildcat looked at the paper and the writing on it. "Boy, us ain't neveh learned to read. Whut dis heah papeh say?"

The rider translated the message for the Wildcat.

"Vitus Marsden en route Southern Pacific or Anchor Line packet with one ostrich. Keep ostrich or sell him. Stay away from my place with him. Ostrich too savage to have around house."

The Wildcat jerked on Lily's rope.

"Huh! Dat ol' papeh don't say nuthin' us ain't done. Come 'long, goat! Us is done 'zactly whut de white folks craves. Double-time dem laigs, Lily, till us finds whah at us kin git action on dis prize money. My stummick craves meat vittles."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE turkey prize money afforded the Wildcat a sailing-radius which enabled him to travel until he had located Demmy. The sawed-off brunette was not permanently anchored to the job wherein the Wildcat found him, and within a day or two after the reunion the Wildcat's restlessness had infected Demmy.

With the mascot goat the pair prowled in clover for a week, until their funds ran out, and then they began a forced march toward their old-time base of supplies, which was commanded by the Wildcat's white folks in Memphis, Tenn-o-see.

Way down South in Dixie, headed North and marching along a dusty road in a promised land that was nothing much but promises, the Wildcat growled a command over his shoulder at his half-size companion. "Come 'long heah, Demmy. Side meat an' biskit ain't no animal whut sneaks up on you. You got to run 'em down. Time is money right now. Clod dat Lily goat in de head wit a dornick an' le's git goin'!"

"I'se comin', Wilecat. Seems like I ain't had me no sleep f'r so long."

"Ain't had you no sleep? Huh! Does you stummick crave sleep?"

"Kain't say does it. Wisht us could come up wid some corn-field or mebbe a misguided pullet whut has seen 'nuff of life."

"Keep a-wishin', but whilst you wish—walk. Us eats in dis comin' town!"

"You sounds hopeful wid de whah at, Wilecat, but de when an' how of dis eatin' bizness is whut agitates me."

"Come 'long, boy! Leave de when an' how to Lady Luck. Whut dat farm nigger say dis comin' town name was?"

"Town named Weevil. Easy to remember does you know yo' Bible. Mind de place whah de boy gits smote an' returns good f'r weevil?"

"Ain't de same word."

"Neveh mind whut dis town called—chances is folks eats in it. Dat's mo' 'n us has done since dis progress begun whut you said was leadin' to fame an' fortune. Us is like all de rest of dem progressive boys—gits so far ahead of Lady Luck dat when de dinner bell rings, us kain't heah it."

"Demmy, mebbe de Lawd is yo' shepherd like you said a while back befo' dey runs you out of dat revival-meetin' an' give yo' collection plate to a one-arm man. Mebbe de Lawd is yo' shepherd, but jus' now I'se close nuff to reach you wid fren'ly words, an' f'r de las' time I tells you, quit moanin' an' come a-runnin' befo' I starts me a bullhead barbecue consistin' of one sawed-off nigger. I don't like dis country no mo' dan you does. Ol' Man Trouble drug me back to Dixie, an' de only way us kin git out of it is

to git 'nuff money so de railroad boys will haul us back 'long de track to Memphis whah at Cap'n Jack is waitin' fo' his p'odigal niggers."

"Wished us was dere now. Or even Los Angeles. Or Po'tland."

"Thought you told me de police folks needed you in Lost Anxious. Ain't you said dey craves to meet up wid you?"

"Neveh says is they. Whut happened was I gits me a job wid a man whut runs a two-bit auto park. Got along good till de man sold a auto'beel whut neveh belong to him. All de police folks did was ax me questions an' turn me loose."

"Lucky you gits loose. Nobody axes me no questions in dat ruckus down heah. Nobody turned me loose. Ol' judge he told me things. In Lost Anxious dey axes you an' turns you loose. Down heah dey tells you, an' retains hold of you in de big stone house. Seems like dey don't know no numbehs till it's sixty."

"Wuz de jail cool?"

"Not so cool as us could keep fannin' heavy wid a fo'-leaf cloveh. . . . Come 'long oveh heah a minnit whilst us axes dis farm nigger some questions 'bout dat fo'thcomin' Weevil town. Got to ax 'bout de white folks an' de lodges. Always is betteh to find out whut you is steppin' into befo' it looms up in yo' face too close f'r runnin' purposes."

The pair, leading Lily, detoured from the road long enough to subject a laboring member of their race to a cross-examination concerning the social and eco-

nomic features of the town of Weevil which lay down the road half a mile ahead of them.

"How is de lodge bizness in dis Weevil town?" the Wildcat asked.

"De Bulger Custis boy whut runs de barbeh shop on Laurel Street is de likker secretary of de Hand an' Foot Club. He kin tell you mo' dan whut I kin. Same boy is pres'dent of de Grain Gin Careless Club an' de local leadin' soopreem aggitator of de Sons of Damon."

"Sho'! You tells me dey is a Sons of Damon Lodge in dis Weevil town?"

"Us is. Dat barbeh boy named Bulger Custis is sort of de head man since de last election."

The Wildcat turned to his diminutive companion. "Heah dat, Demmy! Come 'long, an' come runnin! Us is headed fo' my fraternal friend. Chances is us eats right after I gives him de grip an' de password."

Demmy dragged heavily on Lily. "Git comin', goat, whilst us 'filiates wid a chance to eat."

Fifteen minutes later the trio entered the front door of the Bulger Custis barber shop.

Age had brought weight to the lodge-leading proprietor of the barber shop, and when the Wildcat entered the place he discovered his fellow member of the Sons of Damon seated in a ponderous canvas chair. Bulger Custis was honing one of a group of razors. He looked up from his work and regarded the Wildcat with eyes from which gleamed little of welcome or fraternal friendliness.

The Wildcat held out his hand. "Does I greet a fellow membeh of de Sons of Damon?"

"You does." Bulger Custis admitted the truth without enthusiasm.

"Name bein' Bulger Custis?"

"Sho' is."

The Wildcat beckoned to Demmy, who had hung back near the door of the barber shop. "Step up, Demmy, an' meet Brotheh Custis!"

The hand of fellowship that was extended to Demmy held nothing of promise so far as rations were concerned.

"Well, dat's dat." The Wildcat sighed heavily, as if a week's work had been accomplished. "Us has come miles to meet you. Whut dis Grain Gin Club which I heard you is pres'dent of? An' whilst I'se axin', is de roll of members filled up?"

The membership of the Grain Gin Careless Club was at the moment complete except for three of the transportation department who were serving ninety-day sentences for bootlegging. Bulger Custis, thinking fast, figured that in Demmy and the Wildcat he had discovered replacement troops for the front line battles with the local prohibition forces. "De membership list is full jus' now 'ceptin' f'r two openin's. De club needs two good steady men in de Official Department. De Royal Imperial Bev'rage Porteh, an' de Secondary Servidor, is two offices which is vacant at de moment."

"Says you! Mighty official-soundin' offices."

"Sho' is! Full regalia—wid gold braid coats an' ev'rything. Does you know de West Corneh Ritual in de Sons of Damon Lodge?"

"Sho' do! Me an' Demmy is held all de official chairs in de lodge."

"Dat's good. Den de chances is you kin be conducted into de 'steemed an' honorary Grain Gin Club widin' de next come twenty-fo' hours. Besides yo' official duties in dem two high-rankin' offices you has a heavy sideline whut tests yo' 'sponsibility to a 'larmin' degree."

"Sho' do! Sech as whut?"

"Dat will be revealed unto you, brotheh, at a fittin' moment."

"Is dey some social lunch or anything such as vittles goes wid de festivilies?" Demmy craved to know more about the commissary department.

"Mo' dan you could eat wuz you rav'nous."

"Mebbe so. I ain't neveh cracked under de strain of eatin' yet, 'spite of whut I lacks in size." Demmy made his boast. And then spurred on in his search for the bitter truth: "When de next social meetin' wid lunch?"

"Next meetin' happens to-night."

The Wildcat looked at Demmy. "You heahs whut Brotheh Custis tells you, Demmy. Next meetin' to-night. Guess de worthy brotheh has two applications. Furthehmore, Brotheh Custis," the Wildcat continued, "speakin' gentle to a strangeh in a strange land, kin you donate some advice whah at me an' Demmy kin locate a sudden job whut might bring

us fo' bits cash or credit dat us could use f'r stummick purposes?"

"Brotheh, you pains me! Does you mean to tell me dat you boys is 'fested wid poverty?"

"Temp'rary! Temp'rary only. Ol' Man Trouble camped on de trail a ways back an' us ain't et since, lately."

"How far since? De point is, 'nitiation in de Grain Gin Club is five dollahs each. Mebbe you better walk down to de freight deepo. I hears dey is unloadin' fo' cars of coal an' some mo' shovel freight such as sand an' gravel, an' de chances is us could git de 'nitiation fee redoosted in a special case like dis."

The Wildcat looked at his brother Damon. "Diggin' mo' an' mo' into dis mountain of words, does you 'spect, Brotheh Custis, dat me an' Demmy could uncoveh mebbe fo' bits heah in yo' barbeh shop so as to git ten loaves of bread or somethin' befo' us starts wrastlin' wid dis coal bizness? In de name of Damon, an' de sacred ties of humble frien'ship, dat is?"

The sacred ties of humble friendship creaked and groaned under the strain suddenly imposed upon them, but held fast for a net stress of thirty cents. "Git back heah just as quick as de pay-off boy sees you afteh you quits work to-night. Not dat I trembles 'bout de thutty cents, but because dey is lots of official things I has to tell you befo' de brethrens assembles."

"Sho' will! Come 'long, Demmy! Us is got lots of bizness to 'range befo' de lodge meets."

Demmy, fairly trotting beside the Wildcat and

Lily, defined the nature of the immediate business which confronted him. "De main job is findin' a groc'ry sto' whut is careless about how much rations dey emits fo' thutty cents."

"Boy, yo' face is cluttered wid truth!"

The Wildcat and his companion lunched on a ten-cent loaf of bread and two ten-cent tins of sardines. "Sop up dat li'l gravy whut oozes 'roun' dem sourdeen fishes, Wilecat," Demmy advised. "Seems like to me dese heah measly li'l fishes is got to work mighty hard to give you strength 'nuff to unshovel a carload of coal."

"Nearly ten o'clock now, Demmy. De mos' I kin see is seven hours' work, an' de Lawd knows us has trompled through twice dat much widout no rations a-tall. Dat bread is strength'nin'."

"Sho' is. But hard to cram down yo' neck widout trimmin's. My mind is dwellin' on ice wateh."

"Neveh mind, boy! Some place 'long de line us ketches up wid Lady Luck far 'nuff to count de cash whut adds up railroad fare back to San Framcisco. An' on de train, does you crave to, you kin bulge yo' pussonal stummick to de bustin'-point wid free ice wateh!'

"Long ways ahead. I hates to strain my mind thinkin' how much coal us has to shovel befo' we digs down deep 'nuff to find de price of dem railroad tickets."

"Ain't goin' to shovel me no railroad tickets. All I craves is 'nuff to leave me 'filiate wid dese Weevil Lodge niggers. Dat Bulger Custis boy in de barbeh

shop said dey wuz consid'rable bizness goin' on wid dese field hands an' town niggers 'roun' heah. Leave me start wid one lucky gallop of de baby cubes! Us builds up a pile of cash so high you kin stand on de top an' see de San F'mcisco fog f'm dis heah Weevil town!"

"You sounds hopeful, Wilecat."

"An' I ain't no rainbow! Whut I means—ev'ry time us gits fo' bits f'm dis coal car man, us puts de bone yeast in it an' when she gits through swellin' on de gamblin' flo' she means anotheh ten miles 'long de line to Memphis, Ten-o-see! Dere is yo' railroad yard!"

"An' dere is yo' coal cars loaded wid hopes an' railroad tickets. All dey needs is heavy shovelin'! Come 'long whilst us talks to de man!" Under the spur of the Wildcat's hopeful words, the sawed-off Demmy panted for action.

The coal car man was seated in the shade, half asleep under the influence of the heat and the bitter end of a five-cent cigar, when the Wildcat and Demmy accosted him. The first supplicant removed his hat and carried it, crumpled, close against his leg. Demmy, as usual, hung back and let the Wildcat do the talking.

"Cap'n, suh, kin you thrive wid two mo' good shovel hands?"

"Where are they?"

"Me an' dis sawed-off boy heah craves to hire on."

"Can you unload that car single-handed before dark?"

The Wildcat answered without looking at the car. There was but one answer. "Cap'n, yassuh!"

"All right. Four bits an hour. I can't use the other boy."

The Wildcat opened his eyes. "Mebbe kin I 'splain about him, you hires him too. Demmy is built middlin' low to de groun', but dat boy kin unload dis car long befo' any otheh nigger gits begun. He don't have to travel so far afteh de coal 'count standin' low down an' close to it."

The day was too hot for argument and the white man's burden for the moment was getting the cars unloaded. "All right," he conceded. "Get your shovels out of that wagon over there and get started on those next two cars. There's free ice water in that keg under the wagon. Drag it, and get goin'."

"Cap'n, yessuh!"

The pair dragged it rapidly in the direction of the free ice water. After the third cup of the gratifying fluid, the Wildcat tied Lily to a spoke of a wagon wheel and with Demmy beside him he moved, slow-time, toward his personal bituminous coal problem.

Demmy dug himself in during the first hour and thereafter nothing could be seen of him except the occasional glimpse of his woolly head bobbing above the side of the car. His industry was marked by a steady movement of coal.

At six o'clock the white man yelled an announcement. "Come and get it!"

He addressed himself to Demmy and the Wildcat. "Get back here at seven o'clock if you want to and

keep on working until you get your cars unloaded."

"Yessuh."

The Wildcat pocketed his three-fifty without signing any contracts covering his return. He was grimy with coal dust and the jet disguise had been streaked and furrowed by streams of perspiration. Demmy's eyes gleamed white from the dead black area of his face.

The pair hit the nearly empty keg of ice water for a row of quarts. And then, leading Lily, they started toward the Bulger Custis barber shop.

"Demmy, us has got seven dollahs betwixt us." The Wildcat mopped his brow with his sleeve. "I don't botheh work when work don't botheh me. An' I ain't a-skeered of work. But all I says is, does dat coal white man see me again, it won't be in de midst of no coal car."

"Like as not to, 'less Lady Luck rallies 'roun'. Coal money goes f'r de same kind of rations as whut gamblin'-money does."

"Jus' de same kind of money, Demmy, 'ceptin' it sticks longeh when you mixes it wid sweat, like I tole you befo'. Dis mawnin' I figgers did I have fo' hund'ed dollahs I spends it all f'r groc'ries. Now, wid a measly seven dollahs betwixt you an' me an' Lily, us figgers a fo'-bit meal, any place, is big 'nuff."

"You an' me both! Size up de meal 'longside of de coal it took to earn it, an' de way I feels I could eat hearty on five cents' worth of dawg meat."

Before they arrived at the barber shop, they appropriated fifty cents apiece for a mass of nutriment

at a lunch counter whose motto was quantity before quality.

Strengthened and refreshed, they journeyed onward, down the street, arriving at seven o'clock at the Custis establishment.

Encountering the proprietor of the barber shop, seated on the front porch, the Wildcat greeted him with a warmth that suggested to Bulger Custis' ears a shortage in the treasury.

"Me an' Demmy sho' is glad to git back to de social part of town whah folks is human. Sho' noble to see you, Bulger! When does de brethrens mingle?"

"How much money is you got?" Bulger countered with a direct interrogation which failed to chill the Wildcat's friendliness.

"Demmy an' me is agitated all de coal in de world since last us seed you. White folks gives me measly li'l seven dollahs. Mebbe de 'nitiation rates kin be redoosted?"

Knowing the worst, Bulger Custis made haste to reduce the initiation rates so that he could make sure of a couple of gin-runners whose capture would mean nothing lost to the local community. "Boys, speakin' wid de hand of friendship extended, an' de palm open, pay me de special dispensation rate of five dollahs f'r two candidates, an' you is drafted into de halls of pleasure."

The two coal-heavers parted with their hard-earned wages, leaving for themselves but a dollar apiece.

"Bulger, when does us git de official re-ceipt f'r dis 'nitiation money?"

"As soon as de recordin' secretary 'rives in de lodge. Main thing now is f'r you boys to git appointed."

"Whut you mean? Git 'pointed."

"Appointed on committees. Ev'rybody is on some committee or otheh. You starts wid de entertainment committee an' finally gits up to de committee on travelin' 'roun'."

"You means us plays a ho'n in de band or somethin' on dis entertainment committee?"

"Ain't said which. Whut you does do is go down de street till you gits to de big elm on de left, an' turns into de lane. You travels de lane 'bout a quarter, till it branches. You takes de spindlin' right-hand branch, crossin' de creek a half-mile out, an' headin' straight f'r risin' ground. You passes through a li'l stand of hick'ry saplin's an' down a side hill path to de swamp whah de moanin' cypress is. You knows de tree when you sees it—biggest cypress in de world. You edges de swamp, keepin' to de right f'r mebbe half a mile, an' you comes on Sis' Meeker's place. You tells Sis' Meeker I sends you an' hands her dese two dollahs. Next thing you knows she hands you back two filled-up jugs."

"Filled up wid whut?"

"Filled up wid de ancient an' honorable social-purpose lodge-meetin' gin. You packs it back here to de back do' of dis place, avoidin' anythin' like makin' a public exhibition of yo'self on de way back, an' you hits de back do' wid de three official knocks of de new candidate."

"Us does. Is dat all?"

"Dat's all—'ceptin', as I said befo', let yo' good work be done in secret. Does you return safe an' sound, you will be welcomed into de fold wid de faithful. On yo' way! It's afteh seven now an' de brethrens rallies about eight. You has got de orders."

"Sho' is!" The Wildcat picked up Lily's leading-string. "Come 'long, Demmy. Le's go." He started away down the street.

"Wait a minnit! Hold on wid dat goat."

The peremptory tone in Bulger Custis' voice halted the marching pair.

"Dey is a town law 'bout leadin' goats at evenin', 'count of dey scares farm stock and buggy horses. Take de goat in de back room of de barbeh shop an' tie him dere."

"Kain't see no sense in dis law bizness about goats." The Wildcat grumbled his objections to the local law but obeyed the Custis command.

The command had been inspired by a desire for reasonable security for the two dollars entrusted to the gin-smugglers, and with his design accomplished the proprietor of the barber shop sat at ease on the front porch and saw the two new candidates march down the street without their goat. A placid smile of content settled on his countenance. "De barbeh business ain't so good," he reflected, "but heah is free gin an' three dollahs oveh an' above ev'rythin' else. Well, de day ain't been wasted." He touched a match to the broom end of a frazzled cigar and enveloped himself in a pungent cloud of smoke. "No, de day ain't been wasted."

Farther down the road Demmy and the Wildcat voiced the same sentiments. "Us starts out worse dan nothin' dis mawnin', Demmy. Heah us is—goin' to git mingled into a grand Lodge, got our stummicks quieted down wid middlin' noble rations, on your way to whah de gin spring flows, comin' back to mingle wid de boys. Looks to me like mebbe Lady Luck wuz flappin' 'roun' mighty close!"

CHAPTER XIX

WITHIN half an hour the Wildcat and Demmy had traversed the spindling branch of the lane that led toward the gin supply. They passed the hickory saplings on the rising ground and turned to the right past the big cypress on the edge of the swamp and covered the half-mile to Sis' Meeker's cabin.

In front of the cabin a withered hag, blacker than the swamp waters around the cypress roots, sat on a split-log bench. Sis' Meeker was smoking a pipe and fanning away droves of foolhardy mosquitoes with a frazzled straw hat.

The Wildcat approached her. "Is I speakin' wid de lady knowed as Sis' Meeker?"

Sis' Meeker batted her eyes once in answer to the Wildcat's question.

" 'Cause if I is, me an' dis boy craves to trade two silveh dollahs whut Bulger Custis sent f'r two jugs of yo' famous mope remedy."

Sis' Meeker held out a twisted hand, palm upward, and the action aroused all of the Wildcat's dormant business instincts. "Yass, ma'am," he said diplomatically. "Whilst you-all is gittin' de jugs, I sees whah at I laid away dem two dollahs." He began searching through one pocket after another.

Sis' Meeker laid down her pipe and the frazzled straw hat and hobbled into the dark interior of the hut that was her place of commerce and residence.

She came forth, presently, bowed under the weight of two stoneware jugs. She set the jugs on the split-log bench and again held out her hand.

The Wildcat circled around her and removed the corncob stopper from one of the jugs. He sniffed at the liquid contents of the jug and then without further hesitation he handed the aged crone the price of the mope-chasing gin. "Heah you is, woman. Sho' smells right! Me an' Demmy an' de Bulger boy is obliged to you! Us sees you de next time us gits de cravin' f'r joy juice, an' de price at de same time. Bids you good evenin'."

The speaker turned to Demmy. "Grab a holt dat otheh jug, Demmy, an' come 'long heah to whah de lodge folks is waitin'!"

Demmy lifted the other jug, giving it a precautionary inspection before he started the return journey at the Wildcat's heels.

They had marched back as far as the big cypress when Demmy voiced the thought that filled them both. "Dey ain't nothin' in de lodge manual whut says nothin' about not seein' how is dis gin when you is weak an' heavy-laden, is dey?"

"Us ain't seed de manual as yet, but does I know lodge manuals I sez dey ain't. Wrastle yo' own jug whilst I wrastles mine an' it shows less in case de 'vestigatin' committee gits goin'."

Halted, and facing each other, the two gin-bearers

thrust their thumbs through the jug handles and for ten seconds a low gurgling mingled with the lesser noises of the insect life that disturbed the absolute silence of the swamp country. The gurgling ceased and the corncob stoppers were pounded back to place. The march was resumed.

At eight o'clock, having eluded three or four prohibition agents, the pair came to the back door of the barber shop.

Inside the building they heard the noises of the first chapter of the lodge meeting. "Seems like de boys is rallied 'roun', Demmy!" the Wildcat whispered.

"Sho' is! Try de three knocks an' see does dat git us in."

"Any time three knocks don't git us in, two jugs of gin will. Neveh seed no password yet any betteh dan havin' a quart of likker wid you."

Their alarm on the door was answered with an alacrity which suggested a thirsty reception committee.

Bulger Custis looked at the two jugs of gin and heaved a heavy sigh of relief. He greeted them with a sincerity which left no doubt of their being welcome. "Set down de official tonic an' ado'n yo'selves wid de regalia—dem gold-braided coats over dere hangin' agin' de wall."

While the Wildcat and Demmy were getting into their initiation uniforms, Bulger Custis occupied himself with cleaning the dust out of a dozen or more less dilapidated shaving-mugs. By the time this work

was finished, the two candidates were ready for whatever duties might await them.

The initiation ceremony was comparatively simple. "Hold out yo' right hand," the director ordered. "Dis heah is a private 'nitiation into de Grand Gin Careless Club and De Hand an' Foot Club. One and all you two is hereby made e-steemed membehs! Dat's all de official part. Confidential, as yo' fellow lodge brotheh, I tells you, now, yo' next move is to gurgle de joy-juice into dem shavin'-mugs an' circulate amongst de brethrens in de front room. Bring de gin 'long whilst I 'nounces yo' 'nitiation."

The candidates would have preferred a ceremony slightly more elaborate, but on the word of the leading member they had been regularly inducted into membership in the local organization, and so, forthwith, they set about the performance of their fraternal duties to their thirsty brethren.

Laden with two shaving-mugs half filled with gin, Demmy started for the middle room of the establishment wherein the formal meeting of the lodge was taking place. He shoved the door open with his foot. "Brethrens, heah you is! Come an' git it!" he announced. And then, seeing that the assemblage was not as formal as he had imagined, he handed his burden, right and left, to the first two applicants.

The formalities in the lodge room at the moment consisted of kneeling in a circle about a pair of dice which passed from hand to hand with the rise and fall of points and sevens.

The Wildcat, following close behind Demmy, disposed of his two mugs of gin by handing the first one to a fellow-member and pouring the contents of the second one down his own throat. "Whuff! Sho' tasted noble!" He leaned over and whispered quickly to Demmy: "Leave me have yo' money whilst I 'filiates wid de festivilies when de gallopers gits 'roun' heah!"

Without protest Demmy gave up his entire cash capital.

The Wildcat clinked it against its fellow-coin in his hand.

"Leave de new membeh git his action! Leave dis Wilecat boy show whut kin he do!'

The Wildcat boy showed what he could do.

A record of his performance, in impromptu verse, is included in the minutes of the meeting:

"Way down South whah de sevens bloom,
De Wilecat he craved elbone room.

He rolled a seven an' done it again,
He hadn't shot a dollah since de Lawd knew when.

He made three passes an' bust into song,
Right then an' there de boy went wrong;

He tole de world an' he rose to state
Dat he wuz de boy whut could duplicate.

So fade me, brethrens, you is met—
Once a fly got ketched in a spider's net.

You may be good but you sho' kain't last,
De ace an' a deuce on de fo'-time pass!

De Lawd is yo' shepherd, now you is bust!
Learns you not to throw dem snake eyes fust."

Snake eyes had appeared, and with them hope faded from the Wildcat's heart.

The look of dejection which overspread his face brought ready verbal sympathy from a volunteer quartet. They started moaning their song of fellowship, their voices blending in a harmony which softened the clicking of the fatal dice. "Dis is f'r de benefit of de new an' worthy brotheh who stumbled on de snake eyes," the leader announced, "sung in memory of whut might have been." Then, with their heads wagging to the measured time of the chant:

"Us is brethren, bound togetheh, wid de sacred bonds of Love,
Sheltered f'm earth's stormy weatheh, reapin' blessin's f'm Above."

The Wildcat listened without losing much of his gloom. And, then: "Sho' is good singin'. Kinda slow an' doleful like though. Mebbe I is reapin' blessin's f'm Above jus' now, but awhile back I wuz reapin' snake eyes f'm Ol' Man Trouble. Now, mo' dan de blessin's mentioned in de recent melody, whut I craves is an inside splash of Sis' Meeker's hope-juice. Come 'long heah, Demmy, whilst I puts out de mis'ry fire whut is ragin' in my bosom wid a drink of fraternal gin!"

Demmy followed his master's voice into the back room and the pair poured out, respectively, something

less than half a pint of the fluid of forgetfulness.

"As de prize fool you ain't got no competition whut I kin see!" Demmy whispered to the Wildcat after his drink of gin had disappeared down his eager throat.

"How come?"

"Whut you think how come? Who handed you dem dice?"

"Preacheh's boy."

"Who handed you de new pair afteh you makes yo' third pass?"

"Ain't seed no new pair."

"You ain't seed nuthin' much! You makes three passes wid yaller dice. An' you makes snake eyes wid white ones whut de preacheh's boy rolls back at you!"

"Don't tell me, Demmy, dat dese lodge folks is deceived me!"

"Seems like I kain't tell you nuthin'!"

"Demmy, you grieves me when you states dat a lodge brotheh is fell so low f'm grace as to nick de skin of de sho'n lamb wid de razor of deceit. Yo' grieves me."

A summons, growled through the half-open door, awakened the pair of mourners.

"Come runnin' wid dat gin, brotheh! De social part is slackenin' up. Keep de gin flowin', an' keep it flowin' dis way!"

"Us is a-comin'!" Demmy arranged half a dozen shaving-mugs along a battered table and promptly filled them from one of the jugs. While he was thus

occupied, the Wildcat walked to the door and opened it slightly with his foot.

Through the narrow aperture he watched the progress of the crap game, and then suddenly his attention was riveted upon the door at the far end of the room. The other door was opening, quietly and steadily, and in the front room of the barber shop the Wildcat saw the gleam of a metal star, chest-high from the floor, pinned to a background of blue.

He withdrew his foot quickly and whispered to Demmy: "Come 'long! Grab dat goat an' de full jug! Police folks is in front! Mebbe dey ain't at de back do' yet."

With Lily and a half-empty jug of gin, wearing the gold-braided coats, the Wildcat and Demmy faded through the back door of the lodge room in time to discover that the Wildcat's "mebbe" was correct.

At the moment the alley was clear and a resolve to be away from there before it became populated with police folks lent strength to the running-gear of the two-legged fugitives. In less than thirty seconds they had fairly dragged Lily past the elm at the end of the street.

They turned instinctively down the lane which they had followed toward Sis' Meeker's house. The panting Demmy questioned his galloping companion. "Whah at is us headed—Sis' Meeker's gin-house?"

"Us ain't! Chances is de second place whah de police folks visits to-night is de gin woman's house. Whah de lane branches, us turns to de left!"

Where the lane branched, the Wildcat directed a

hurried retreat to the left and toward whatever might await them in the strange country that would come with the dawn.

Two miles out of town the trio slackened their pace, but until long after midnight they kept up a fast march that averaged nearly four miles an hour.

They crossed a wide field before morning and while the day was breaking they saw before them the street lights of a town two miles away.

They halted in a wooded corner of a broad field, and here, concealed from passers-by who might journey along the road which led into the town, they went into executive session, planning the next card to be played in their game with Old Man Trouble and Lady Luck.

"Whuff!" The Wildcat subsided with his back against a small tree, and Demmy was quick to follow suit. "Whuff! Don't aim to git me no closer to no town yet. It's comin' mawnin' now, an' lots of rest ain't goin' to do me no harm."

"Me an' you both! Hand me dat gin jug, Wilecat, whilst I rests myse'f wid a gurgle. Whut does you do next afteh de sleepin'-contest is done?"

"Demmy, I done me a lot of thinkin' 'long wid de walkin' and runnin'. Us still craves to git out of dis land, permanent."

"Sho' do!"

"You says right! Only way us kin git out is wid money. De quickest way to git money is to leave dese local farm niggers donate. De only way you gits dem to donate is afteh dey gits hog-wild wid big

ideas. Me an' you give 'em de big ideas an' stands back whilst de cash showers down f'm de tree whah Lady Luck is roosted."

"Sounds hard to me."

"Sounds hard, does it? Well, Demmy, sleep dat way an' don't strain yo' brain! F'm now on until dis aftehnoon I aims to sleep me sixty miles. Fust man whut wakes up gits down to de creek crossin' de road down dere an' lugs back his hat filled wid wateh f'r whoever sleeps de longes'. Does you wake up, all I says is roust me out at five o'clock! Beginnin' then, you an' me is de fust membehs of de new lodge called de Valiant Foes of Doom! I got de name. I remembeh a preacheh nigger named Honeytone Boone aimed once to start dat lodge. Aimed steady but de police met him befo' he pulled de trigger on his aim. Wake me up at five—dat's all I tells you!"

There was no reply from Demmy because Demmy was asleep, and within the same minute the Wildcat had followed him away from the harsh realities of earth, into a land of idleness, strong gin, free ice water, and four meals a day.

CHAPTER XX

WHILE the Wildcat and Demmy slept, Lily indulged her appetite.

She grazed a little circle about the tree to which she was tethered and then began upon the tree, eating its bark as high up as she could reach.

At five o'clock, with all available material eaten, she began upon the quarter-inch halter rope that was knotted about her neck. She ate it in two, and then, believing that her master had enjoyed enough sleep, she butted him slightly three or four times with her curving horns.

Under the impact of the attack, the Wildcat was rolled over until he lay on his side, with his mouth open.

A moment later, half choking to death, and with the late afternoon sun shining down his throat, he batted his eyes and awakened. "Lawd gosh, I wuz dreamin' of nutrifyin' rations and cold soda pop!"

He sat up and looked about him. "Git away f'm me, goat!"

He got upon his feet. He stooped down and shook Demmy into wakefulness. "Five o'clock, sun time, Demmy! Git yo' eyes open! Us has got to start dis cash-winnin' program. Ain't no waitin' till tomorr'! By dat time de chances is de last night's

news reaches de country f'r miles around. R'ar back on yo' hind legs! Stand up an' le's go!"

Demmy stood up, blinking. "Says you, Wilecat! Whut does us do next afteh two drinks of dis gratifyin' gin is lost to de world?"

The Wildcat pointed in the general direction of town.

"See dat li'l grove of oaks down dere on de edge of de road? Dat's whah me an' you starts de combination outdo' chu'ch an' lodge! Mighty handy place, bein' as dat red buildin' across de way f'm it is de railroad deepo. Us ties Lily in dat li'l grove of oaks down dere wid a piece of balin'-wire. You goes oveh to de railroad deepo an' finds out 'bout when de trains gits out of town, while Lily stands hitched."

With their preliminary plans formed, the trio again took up the march, reaching the grove of oaks in half an hour.

Lily was tethered with a piece of baling-wire which had been discovered along the road.

The half-empty jug of gin was stored away at the foot of the tree to which Lily was tied. The gin was concealed with the two gold-braided coats which the Wildcat and Demmy had worn in their flight from the Bulger Custis barber shop in Weevil.

With these details accomplished, Demmy set out toward the railroad depot across the way to get the information regarding the leaving-time of such passenger trains as might stop in the town.

The Wildcat, on the other hand, marched down the road to the main street of the town, and when he came

to this street he continued his course until he encountered a youth of his own color. "Lissen to me, boy, whilst I axes you——"

"Whut you axes me?" The Negro boy, who was hoeing a front garden, seized upon the opportunity to rest, and in spite of the surly tone of his question he listened to the Wildcat's interrogation.

"Fust off I axes you de name of dis town."

"Folks calls it Muscat."

"Second off I axes you how is de white folks?"

"Concerning us?"

"You says!"

"White folks is peaceable. Ain't been no uprisin' f'r gwine on three months, since Judge Millsap missed his bay mule."

"Dat's good. How about lodges?"

"Ain't but two lodges. Mos' ev'rybody belongs. Religion is craved mo' dan lodge work since de last revival."

"Dat's good! Dat's even betteh. Tell me one mo' question, boy. Whah de leadin' boa'din-house in dis town f'r field hands an' such?"

"About two blocks down, an' you turns to de right. Laurel Street is de street. Fifth house f'm de corneh."

"Kain't read me no Laurel. How does I tell it?"

"Grocery sto' on de corneh. Fust grocery you comes to."

"Dat's all, boy—'ceptin' I tells you drop de hoe an' spread de news!"

"Whut news?"

"De news dat de grand organizin' redeemer of de Valiant Foes of Doom is 'rived in yo' midst! You knows de li'l grove of oaks back 'long de road a piece?"

"Sho' us does."

"De prophit an' de redeemer, along wid de sacred goat, rallies dere in dem oak trees to-night undeh de mysterious Come-All summons of de home lodge. Dey rallies to greet de local brethrens wid de ceremonies an' festivilies of mystery. Grand dance. Free tin cans wid hair-straightener. Ev'ry lady gits a postcard wid de picture of a white angel on it. Free gin. Hog barbecue. Some gamblin'. Fo'-piece music. Fried fish. Sashes f'r one an' all to wear. Plume hats f'r de gents. Free gold watches. An' de mysterious bizness whut I kain't tell about. Drop de hoe is all I tells you an' spread de news!"

The young Negro's eyes opened as the Wildcat baited the hook.

By the time the Wildcat had come to the statement concerning the presentation of gold watches, the hoe had been forgotten and at the risk of losing his job and his freedom the young darky started for the center of town, bearing the news of the first and only profits belonging to the Valiant Foes of Doom.

The Wildcat returned to where his companion was waiting for him. "All fixed, Demmy! Sho' be a nigger crowd heah by half pas' six! Whut time dat train leaves?"

"Train leaves 7:10, Memphis-bound. I got bad news f'r you, Wilecat."

"Tell it to me. Seems like dat's all de news dey is any more. Whut is it?"

Demmy pointed at Lily.

"Look at dat goat! Dat's whut it is! Tell me dat Lily is yo' mascot! When you learns de truth, de chances is you an' me ties dat varmint to de track. Look at dat goat, I tells you!"

"Whut de matteh wid Lily?"

Lily at the moment was stretched out on the ground, to all appearances peacefully asleep, in her normal condition, except that her lower jaw seemed to be unslung to a degree which gave to her usually placid and benevolent countenance a sinister quality.

"Look at dat goat!" Demmy repeated. "Den look at dat jug of gin. Look at dat corncob stoppeh whut dat goat chews out of de jug. Figgeh it out f'r yo'-se'f. Dat mascot is plain drunk!"

The Wildcat walked over to Lily and touched the offender with his foot.

"Wake up heah, goat! Stand up an' tell me how come you 'filiate wid de Demon Rum? Stand up, Lily!"

Lily failed to respond.

The Wildcat stooped down and stood the front half of his mascot on its feet.

Lily opened one eye and in it gleamed the silly look of one who had drunk unwisely and too well. The mascot's lower jaw waggled in a vain endeavor to explain matters but all that came of the attempt was a weakly gargled bleat.

"Dat's all right, goat! Don't say no mo'! Don't

try to tell me. I knows all about you. I'se seed too many humans to make any mistake wid you. Look at dat! Kain't even stand up on yo' feet!"

He turned to his two-legged companion. "Git hold of dem hind legs, Demmy, till us walks dis goat half sober. Fust thing you knows, dis heah sacred goat busts up de meetin' of de Foes of Doom! If us don't start f'r Memphis to-night, it's because we lays over long 'nuff to barbecue dis gin-hound. Git hold dem hind legs whilst us walks Lily half sober!"

For the next ten minutes Lily was transported around in circles with the tips of her feet dragging on the ground in a broken semblance of a walk.

The only success enjoyed by the two revivalists during the time was to see the goat open both eyes at once and to hear a more coherent objection from the depths of Lily's sin-darkened soul.

"Lay dat drunkard down in dat grass a li'l while! Prop her head up! You knows how it is gittin' sober wid yo' head low. Git one of dem regalia coats f'r a pillow! Neveh, in my born days, is I seed such a sudden gin-drinkin' goat. Dat reminds me—is dey anything left in de jug?"

"Sho' dey is. Didn't quite tip it oveh."

"Bring it oveh heah whilst I keeps a-rubbin' my knuckles in dis drunkard's skull. Mebbe I fetches her to befo' de candidates begin rallyin' 'roun'."

Demmy retrieved the jug and brought it over to the Wildcat, shaking it en route close to his ear. "Kain't hear nuthin' but a li'l ray of sunshine."

The Wildcat took the nearly empty gin jug and

rattled a little ray of sunshine around until he had an approximate idea of its contents. He tipped the jug up and drank briefly. "Whuff! I figgers I gits half. Drain it, Demmy, befo' any mo' drunken goats is 'nitiated into our midst."

He looked about him. "An' hurry up about it! Heah comes de fust deputation of dem town niggers. Hustle into yo' regalia coat! An', remembeh—don't speak no language! All you say is garglin' sounds like dem boom-a-loom French niggers. I lets on like I knows whut you says! Now an' den I talks to you de same way you talks! You preaches an' you prays an' I tells 'em whut you is sayin'. An' don't talk no mo' of dat French talk dan you has to, because de chances is some of dese niggers is been in de A.E.F. war an' might ketch yo' meanin' now an' den. Jus' talk crazy, dat's all. I 'splains about de goat! When you gits a chance, do whut you kin to bring dis goat back sober. I tells dese town niggers it's lodge bizness. Heah dey comes! Stand up straight now whilst I greets dese brethrens!"

The Wildcat greeted the first victims who had responded to his glittering promises.

He took them to a section of the oak grove a hundred feet away from where Demmy was standing beside the prostrate Lily.

"Set down heah, brothers! Set steady whilst de Imperial Vang Blong cogitates wid de Sacred Goat! Set heah! Talk if you wants to, but talk low. De fust heat of de ceremonies will be trotted mighty soon. At seven o'clock, dat numbeh bein' fortune's

favorite, de Imperial Vang Blong will pufform de grand givin'-away ceremonies of de gold watch. You is wid de potentates of de Valiant Foes of Doom an' I depen's on you to conduct yo'se'f likewise."

The Wildcat returned to the presence of the Imperial Vang Blong of the Valiant Foes of Doom. Standing stiffly erect, he bowed his head until the recumbent Lily came within his range of vision.

Demmy was still on his knees, massaging the drunken goat's head with his knuckles.

The Wildcat made a deep bow to Demmy and flapped his arms slowly up and down three times. "How is de damn varmint now?" he whispered.

"Goat's eyes is open. I figgers de goat kin stagger 'long some."

"Keep a-goin', Demmy, whilst I orate at 'em! Heah comes a lot mo' niggers! Soon as dey gits heah, I talks to 'em f'r ten minnits. Afteh dat, kin Lily walk any, you starts paradin' 'roun'. If Lily kain't walk, I stays heah an' keeps up de good work whilst you orates single."

Within ten minutes the audience in the grove of oaks had been augmented by a deputation of a dozen hard-boiled brunettes from a road construction camp, by twice as many field hands, and by various roustabout houseboys from the town.

Addressing himself to a mixed group of fifty of his fellows, the Wildcat dangled the bait and followed it with an impromptu selection from the ritual of mystery.

"Donny maw, two jour, vang blong, jam bong, com

bean! . . . De sun sets down in a blaze drowned to death in de broad day. . . . Demons riz up an' de Seven Tail Voodoo roared an' raged 'roun' in de night, pesterin' folks till dey couldn't sleep. . . . Bon jour, two jour, jam bong! . . . Up in de night, f'm de graveyard, riz somethin' dressed in white whut you couldn't shoot wid buckshot an' whut you couldn't trail down wid bloodhoun's, moanin' like de lost souls in hell an' ragin' roun' consid'rable in de field hands' cabins, an' rampagin' down de alleys whah town folks live. . . . Bon jour, com bean, donny maw!"

With each of his cryptic phrases the Wildcat turned toward Demmy and bowed with an arm-waving gesture of respect.

He faced his audience with an explosive question. "Den who riz up?"

Eyeballs began to gleam white in the gathering dusk.

"I axes you who riz up? Ignorant an' downtrod folks, I tells you who riz up an' r'ared back de rampagin' demons of de night. De Imperial Vang Blong riz up! De Imperial Vang Blong of de Valiant Foes of Doom! He riz up, wid de Sacred Goat a-trailin' an' a-clompin' at de devil's legs.

"Who is wid you now? I axes you dat! Oveh dere, wid de Sacred Goat, cogitatin' de mysteries whut 'cumulates when de sun goes down, is de Imperial Vang Blong himself! Bon jour, com bean, donny maw!

"Whut does all dis mean to you niggers? I tells you!

"Fust off, it means dat when you jines on wid de Valiant Foes of Doom no voodoo gits you befo' midnight no time. Oveh an' above dat, de chances is yo' hair gits straight an' stays dat way. Oveh an' above dat, when you is hauled into yo' home on High, all you does is show de angels dat you belongs to dis lodge an' dey says: 'Give de boy a seat wid de white angels!' Does you stay black, I axes you? You does not!

"Oveh an' above dat, whut is you got down heah below to cheer you up in dis vale of woe? Does you draw three cards to a pair wid de luck whut comes f'm dis heah lodge, de chances is dem cards is queens or betteh. Does you crave gin? De chances is de mysterious gin potentate leaves a jug on yo' back do'-step ev'ry night. Is you troubled wid small-size stummick at a barbecue? All you does is pick up a banjo or a sliphorn of anything an' you plays it automatic. Is you unlucky wid wimmin folks? Yo' bad luck stops de minnit you jines on. Is you downtrod an' poverty-struck? De chances is you kain't walk a block widout findin' a pocketbook or mebbe meetin' up wid some brotheh who craves to let you use fo'ty dollahs.

"Steady good luck heah below, an' a front seat wid white raiment, an' yo' face white as snow, on high, in de sky, when you die! Says me!"

The Wildcat sensed in a rising murmur of en-

thusiastic approval the psychological moment for an adventure whose success or failure spelt the freedom of Memphis or local despair.

"De collection will now be took up!"

He retreated quickly to where the empty gin jug lay beside the inebriated mascot.

Halting ten feet away from Demmy, who was still working in an endeavor to revive the drunken goat, he bowed three times. And then: "Now is de make or break minnit, Demmy! I passes midst de brethrens 'cumulatin' de clinkers in dis jug an' makes de roun's an' comes back heah. Afteh dat, whilst I counts de cash, you holds 'em wid yo' boom-loom talk! Kin de goat walk?"

"Chances is de goat kin stagger."

"Dat's noble! Whilst I'se gone, 'cumulate me a dornick an' lay it down heah so I kin bust de jug wid one crack!"

The Wildcat picked up the empty jug and walked toward the assemblage.

He held the jug folded in his arms, close against his chest, in easy range of his vision so that he could inspect all the contributions which might be forthcoming.

He walked with a slow and appropriate dignity, moaning an unintelligible song as he marched.

At the outskirts of the crowd he raised his voice.

"De gin jug has a two-bit neck! Fo'-bit folks kain't jine dis lodge! Shower down, brothehs, wid quarters! Shower down whilst de Imperial Vang Blong gits de Sacred Goat ready f'r de blessin's to

come! Afteh de collection is 'cumulated, de mystery part begins whut saves you all f'm mis'ry an' f'm woe! De mo' you showers down, de less trouble you has wid de earthly grief whut pesters you one and all. Clink heavy! Remembeh de blessin's to come!"

The Wildcat resumed his moanful dirge, threading his way back and forth through the curving ranks of the irregular groups.

With the third contribution, he began juggling the gin jug up and down in a clinking accompaniment of his song:

"Us is travelin' in de gloom,
Two bits makes de gin jug clink;
Brethren of de Foes of Doom,
Wimmin, song an' gin to drink.

Showeh down, it's gittin' late,
Showeh, Valiant Foes of Doom!
Watch dat mysterious potentate,
Stan' back, give me elbone room!

Us is festooned heah below,
Jitney, two bits, silveh dime;
Festooned all about wid woe,
Bowed wid misery all de time.

Strife an' trouble seems to rage,
Fo' bits choke de gin jug's neck—
Like a tigeh in de cage,
Like five aces in one deck.

Wine, an' wimmin, snake eye bone,
Rally, brethren, showeh down!

In de graveyard heah dat moan—
Thousan' miles f'm Frisco town."

The spell of the Wildcat's chant had its effect and, as near as he could audit the receipts, there was over ten dollars in the jug when he returned to where the Imperial Blong had succeeded in standing the sacred goat on her feet.

"Somethin' oveh ten dollahs, Demmy!" he whispered. "Git out dere an' hold 'em whilst I busts de jug! Thank de Lawd it's gittin' dark! Finish up sudden so as to give me a chance wid de clickers!"

Demmy dragged heavily on the baling-wire halter around the sacred mascot's neck and the pair of them marched across the hundred-foot space which separated them from the group of true believers.

Lily staggered along an erratic course, bleating faintly now and then when the baling-wire tightened at her neck.

In the gloom of evening the Wildcat banged his jug down heavily on the stone which Demmy had provided. The bottom of the jug broke, and a moment later the silver offering was safe in the depths of the Wildcat's pocket.

Clenched tightly in the Wildcat's left hand were a pair of dice. They were the owner's personally trained financial weapons.

From then on for five minutes the Wildcat stood at rigid attention, while in the distance he heard his diminutive companion orate for a goal which lay almost three hundred miles away.

CHAPTER XXI

I

STANDING beside Demmy with the sacred half-sober goat between them, the Wildcat faced his audience. He raised his hand to command attention and in his clenched fingers were his own twin clickers.

"Heah de spoken words! I tells you whut de Imperial Vang Blong just orates to you!

"Life is real!" says he. "De night is turnin' chill! Start de sacrificin'-fire oveh beyond you. Git de twigs togetheh. Git de leaves 'cumulated. Git de kindlin'-branches laid square, East an' West. An' when dis is done I touches de match!"

He stepped close to Demmy. "Orate a li'l bit mo' when I lights de fire an' den retreat back slow till you gits out of sight. Den git Lily to de deepo! I comes runnin' when I comes."

The sacrificial fire was ready for the match.

The Wildcat marched toward it and, bowing three times to the gray area of the sky which marked the trail of the sinking sun, he stooped over and touched a lighted match to the dry oak leaves.

Under the accumulation of twigs and branches, the fire caught slowly.

As it began to blaze, from Demmy's lips came three or four unintelligible phrases delivered in an exclamatory tone which betokened the inspiration of tense nerves.

The Wildcat straightened up. With the firelight reflected from his white eyes he translated the Imperial Vang Blong's latest pronouncement.

"Hark ye, brethren. Hark ye to whut is revealed. Hark ye heavy wid both ears! Rally 'roun' heah whilst I propagates de message of mystery!"

The brethren, eyeballs gleaming in testimony of their interest, rallied around the Wildcat.

"Life is give an' take! You gives heed to de words of wisdom an' you takes a chance. De Imperial Vang Blong says dat de night-prowlin' an' mysterious low-flyin' angels of de lodge of de Valiant Foes of Doom craves to see us one an' all jine in de bizness of takin' a chance wid de gallopin' bones whilst de takin' is good. Rally 'roun'! Gimme dat coat!"

The Wildcat reached for a long black overcoat worn by one of his near-by auditors. He got the coat and spread it on the ground. He knelt beside the coat.

In his left hand were the twin clickers. In his right hand he held half the proceeds of the gin jug's silver harvest. "Five an' five, an' five an' five! Dat's twenty silveh slugs—meanin' five dollahs. Fade me, Valiant Foes of Doom, whilst de oak branches blaze. Showeh down, brethren, so dat de

social part kin begin! Somebody loses. Mebbe it's me! Rally 'roun' an' showeh down!"

The rallying was slow for a moment and then from the pressing throng one of the pay-day favorites from the road construction camp dropped a five-dollar bill on the overcoat beside the Wildcat's stake. "Roll 'em, potentate, an' see is you real imperial!"

The Wildcat pulled the dice for a quick throw, shooting from the hip.

They hurdled the cash and halted on a comparatively level area of the outspread overcoat. "De Imperial six-ace stares you in de face! What I means is de ten-dollah bride craves ten-dollah alimony. Shoots de ten, tell me when, don't delay my pay-day pay!"

The five-dollar victim, looking for more punishment, and seeking to retrieve his lost five-spot, dropped a ten-dollar bill upon the overcoat. "Dere you is! Soon or late you breaks yo' neck. Rub, roll, an' repent!"

"Says you! Radio ramblers, broadcast yo' war cry! Rub, roll, an' reveal! Whuff! An' I sees three-fo' on de gamblin' flo'! Oak branches burnin' whilst de acorns drop! Fade me wid twenty whilst de bone cubes flop! Twenty dollahs! Showeh down twenty so de festivilies kin perceed! De gold watch part comes mighty soon!"

A hardened veteran crawled forward through the tight circle of bulging-eyed brethren and in his free hand was a twenty-dollar bill. "You is faded, ol'

Imperial! Dis time you breaks yo' neck an' I cashes on de widow's moan!"

The Wildcat rubbed the dice back of his ear, waiting for Lady Luck's whisper. "Somebody cashes! Mebbe it's you, Whuff! Neveh wid de fust comin' five an' two! Dat's fo'ty dollahs layin' in view—lissen whut I says to you!"

The wail of a locomotive whistle, half a mile away, punctured the Wildcat's discourse.

His ears wagged convulsively twice, reacting with nervous tension. And then, concentrating on the duties of his immediate program, he timed his attack to synchronize with his estimate of the passenger train's progress.

"Engine whistle askin' who? Mebbe me an' mebbe you! Orphan fo'ty dollahs craves to find some good home! Fo'ty dollahs lost in de night! Rally 'roun', lodge folks, wid de relief committee! Lonesome fo'ty craves its mate! How come you all hesitate?"

"I takes twenty!" This from an over-eager spectator.

"Takes de otheh twenty! Roll 'em—you is faded! Nobody neveh made fo' passes on a black overcoat."

"Nobody neveh made fo' passes? Mebbe you says right! Somebody did! An' I sees six an' three! Nona f'm de Milk Street house? De Back Bay lady greets you one an' all! Nona baby, meet up wid Lady Luck! Whuff! Spell yo' name—beginnin' wid five an' endin' wid fo'! In de mystery mumblin'

of de Foes of Doom dat says shoot fifty! Give me elbone room!"

The Wildcat raked down his odd thirty dollars and with the clinking of the handful of quarters which had been his original stake he heard the shrieking brake-shoes of the halting train.

For an instant he pictured the scene alongside the train. Up ahead, the panting engine. A mail sack or two lying on the ground. The express truck hauled up close beside the forward car. A trunk being dragged into the baggage car. And then, up the steps of the Jim Crow car, the sawed-off Demmy, boosting the half drunken sacred goat.

"Time for two more passes does I work middlin' fast!"

And then, aloud: "Shoots de fifty! Showeh down! De gold watch givin' away part comes mighty soon! Gran' barbecue follows de gol' watches! Evenin' is beginnin' to git slowed up. Shoots de fifty! Fade me wid frog skin! Syndicate yo' revenge whilst I collects double!"

An impromptu syndicate, banking heavily on the failure of the fifth throw, met the fifty-dollar bet. And now construction camp money appeared in the hands of half a dozen eager gamblers.

"De Century Limited! One hund'ed dollahs faces me in de eye! Lady Luck, stand by me! Does I make dis pass, git yo' hund'ed dollahs ready f'r de slaughter of de lamb. T-bone teasers, eat yo' meat! Whuff! An' de jaw-bone jokers says six-ace! Whut does you hear me say? You hears me say

whut I says befo'. I shoots de hund'ed! Nail it to de cabin roof! You hears me!"

They heard him.

And, together with the Wildcat's challenge, those members of the crew not too absorbed in the risks of the game heard from the locomotive beside the depot the ringing of the bell.

To the Wildcat's ears came two faint blasts of the whistle and the train-conductor's cry, "'Boar-rr-rd!"

The Wildcat saw a hundred in currency flutter past the level of his eyes and land on the outspread overcoat. He reached out and reaped the green money, stacking it in manageable form directly in front of him.

Now he wasted no time on currying the dice. With one clear ringing plea to Lady Luck he made his last play! "Lady Luck, stand by me! Gallopers, live or die! Bam! An' dey is vaccinated wid 'leven spots! . . . Brethrens, de royal rulin' of de Sons of Doom stops de harves' befo' murder is committed. Com bean, donny maw, jam bong, whilst I confers wid de Imperial Vong Blong about givin' 'way de gol' watches an' startin' de barbecue ev'rybody face West whah at de sun went down an' bow yo' heads in silent prayer. Ask dat ye may receive! Wait an' pray whilst I recooperates de gol' watches f'm de potentate!"

The Wildcat backed away, slowly, out of the circle of firelight, and as he did so he was gratified to see three-fourths of his audience were facing West with heads bowed in silent prayer.

"Make up yo' minds does you want wrist watches o' vest watches wid danglin' chains," he called back. "Both is made outen fust class solid gold."

He pocketed his dice and the thick roll of currency and faded into the night.

A hundred feet away from the throng he began to trot lightly.

Near the depot, seeing the lighted train moving out, he began to run. He shaped a diagonal course, calculated to land him at the rear platform of the last car.

He began to gallop along the wagon road leading to the freight house.

In the shadows of the long freight house he discarded his flapping gold-braided coat. "Kain't be cluttered up wid no regalia in dis race!"

The engine up ahead whistled for a road crossing just as the Wildcat ran around the corner of the freight shed in his race for the rear platform of the last car.

The car was fifty feet ahead of him and moving faster than he was!

Now his mind was working more rapidly than his galloping legs. "Train sho's agile! I kain't go back to dat Weevil town. Kain't tarry heah in dis Muscat place! Dem boys ain't goin' to keep facin' West mo' dan ten minnits! Po' li'l Demmy is on dat train wid de drunken Lily an' both is plumb broke!"

He was galloping now, between the rails.

Where the ballast thinned he leaped to the

smoother pathway which paralleled the right side of the track.

With his course a little clearer he raised his eyes for a moment to where an automobile headlight, stationary at the road crossing, was sweeping the side of the rushing train. For an instant, in the white glare, he saw a woolly head protruding from the open window in the Jim Crow car.

He recognized Demmy's profile, silhouetted against the lighter background of Lily's outstretched neck. "Lawd Gawd! Li'l Demmy gits throwed off dat train jus' as soon as he begins to 'splain not havin' no money at de conductor. Po' li'l Demmy! Po' li'l sacrid drunken Lily! Guess de only thing to do is run till I meets up wid dem two outcasts whah dey gits put off."

When the train disappeared around a curve, the Wildcat considered the desirability of slackening up his pace.

And then: "Nawsuh! Dey might be some good foot-runners in dem Westfacin' brethrens of de Valiant Foes of Doom. Us runs whilst de runnin' ain't crowded!"

At ten o'clock, when the good running had settled into a persistent dog trot, the Wildcat's sweeping inspection of the right-of-way ahead of him revealed a patch of gray against the black country of the night.

Near the patch of gray his ears were assailed by a discouraged bleat.

The runner stopped and called into the dark. "Lily, dat you?"

A wavering cry from the mascot's throat answered him.

He walked over to where Lily was standing in the long green grass that fringed a stagnant pool of rain water beside the railroad track. "Goat, come to 'tenshun! Drunk in line of duty. Sixty days! At ease! At rest!"

Lily subsided, at rest, in response to her master's commands.

Lying in the long grass near Lily, sleeping hard and heavy a million miles away from the cares of the day, lay the diminutive Demmy.

The Wildcat looked down upon the indistinct form of his companion.

Demmy was protected from the chill of the night by the wrapped folds of his gold-braided coat.

Half under his breath the Wildcat spoke his sympathy: "Po' li'l Demmy! Gwine through lots of trouble an' dreamin' sad dreams of grief an' woe. Well, now I wakes him up an' tells him de good news 'bout de greenback harvest!"

He stooped over and shook Demmy's shoulder. "Wake up here, boy! An' lissen to me!"

Demmy came out of his slumbers and sat upright with an alacrity which suggested his fear of the hand of authority. "Who dat? Whut you want?"

"Nobody but me, podneh. How come you sleepin' in dis grass heah by de railroad track?"

Demmy began his explanation of how-come and as he progressed a rising tone of anger polluted the normal tenor of his speech. "How come I'se heah in

de grass by de railroad track? I tells you how come I'se heah in de grass! I boosts Lily on de train. I gits on de train myse'f. I finds a seat an' I crams Lily underneath so de conductor won't see dat mascot when he comes along. Conductor comes along. Us rides de fust mile an' you ain't nowhah to be seen. Dere I is! Sittin' dere, broke, an' de train runnin' fasteh ev'ry minnit! Us rides 'notheh ten minnits, tryin' to figger somethin' out. Ol' conductor comes along wid a big boy brakeman. F'm den on I don't have to figger nothin' out! Conductor says: 'Gimme yo' ticket!' 'Ain't got no ticket.' Conductor says: 'Pay yo' cash fare to whah at you is goin'!' 'I ain't got cash fare to pay f'r backin' up, let alone goin'.' Ol' conductor reached f'r de bell cord. Train don't even stop! Jus' kinda hesitates. Ol' conductor don't hesitate. . . . Had I wings, wid de flyin' start I got, I could of bin in San F'mcisco by now! Me an' Lily hit de grit a mile back—an' rolled to whah you finds us. I goes to sleep. An' heah you is! De minnit I lays eyes on you, I sees Ol' Man Trouble. Dat's whut I sees!"

"Po' li'l Demmy! I don't blame you f'r gittin' het up wid yo' ol' podneh. Lemme tell you, boy! You think Ol' Man Trouble is heah wid us, does you? Lemme talk a minnit, boy! . . . I makes one pass in de midst of dem Foes of Doom. I lets it lay. I makes me one mo'. I lets it lay. Three times I wins, an' leaves it lay! You think Ol' Man Trouble is wid you? Huh! Picks up de bones when de train whistles—an' makes my point! Whut I means,

boy—us leaves Ol' Man Trouble wid de boys, us brings wid us somethin' goin' on two hund'ed an' thutty odd dollahs of whut dem prayin' Foes of Doom has handed oveh to Lady Luck's twins! Light a match, Demmy, whilst I shows you de long green harves' whut de gallopers reap'!"

Demmy lighted a match.

It was a long match and it burned for nearly a minute.

It revealed the Wildcat reaching deep into the right-hand pocket of his pants.

And then into the left-hand pocket of his pants.

And into his two hip pockets.

It revealed a gleam of desperation and despair in the Wildcat's eyes and a discouraged look which fell upon his countenance and spread around his open mouth as far as his sagging lower jaw.

The match went out.

And then in the darkness from the Wildcat's throat there came a halting, whispered, acknowledgment of disaster . . . "I remembehs! I shoved dat money in de pocket of dat regalia coat. Throwed de coat away goin' sixty miles an hour back of de freight house. Dassn't go back to dat town whah I leaves dem prayin' Foes of Doom. By mawnin' some nigger finds de coat. Lawd Gawd, Demmy! Dat Memphis railroad money has been retook by Ol' Man Trouble!"

Demmy hesitated a moment. Then he groaned once, heavily, and curled up in the position from which the Wildcat had awakened him.

The Wildcat went on for a moment, talking to himself. "Three hund'ed miles to Memphis, Teno-see. Us makes mebbe ten miles a year. Mebbe us gits to de promised land in gwine on ten years. Lawd Gawd, Lady Luck! How come you——"

Out of the darkness Demmy answered once. "Git to sleep befo' I takes me a dornick an' busts yo' fool head open! Was brains a million dollahs apiece, a nickel's worth would crowd yo' skull! Shut up and git to sleep!"

II

Home at last. Safe in the fold. A month of the sheltered life in Captain Jack's household in Memphis, and then: "Neveh seed so much work, Demmy." The Wildcat fanned himself with his hat until fanning became work. Thereafter, until he was again summoned to the treadmill into which Old Man Trouble had cast him, he exercised his complainer, aiming his moan at his sawed-off companion in misery. "Cap'n Jack got me draggin' from sun-up till de curse-you bell rings. On top all dat, heah's dis work fo' de Cap'n's wife—extry work 'nuff to tromple me down in de dust lower dan a snake's stummick."

"I knows! I'se been middlin' busy myself—paintin' dat fence an' weedin' de grass dandruff f'm dat lawn an' whitewashin' de pullet coop. Just like a coal mine—only you is ek-sposed mo' to de burnin' sun."

"'Sposed to everything mo'. Like workin' in a

coal mine 'ceptin' dey is only just so much coal in de world but dis work-mine las' fo'eveh. Neveh do seem to run out of work 'round dis place. Come Sat'day night I'se sho' glad."

"No gladder dan whut I is. Neveh seed such a slow-draggin' Sat'day."

"Seems like dey los' count. Whut day dis?"

"Day We'n'sday. Reckon us kin las' till Sat'day, but how come I don't just see—not at de present minnit."

"Wildcat!"

The clarion call to duty.

"Yass'm—I'se comin'!"

The back garden needed about nine hundred dollars' worth of spading up.

"Whuf! Kain't see whut fo' my white folks keeps dis ol' garden patch goin'. S'pose dey does git some onions. S'pose dat ol' spar'grass do sprout up. Cost fo' dollahs a sprout, an' strawbabies fo' bits apiece by de time us reaps 'em. Save 'nuff money buyin' f'm de ol' wagon man to keep de house in garden truck fo' ten yeahs. Ain't no sense in dis pussonal gardenin'. Ain't no good fo' nuthin' 'ceptin' to break my spine wid stoopin' oveh dis long-handle dull banjo."

The complaint department worked overtime and added its abnormal burden to the ordinary load of accumulated woes that the Wildcat carried.

All day long, whenever casual movements along common routes of industry brought them within hailing distance of each other, the Wildcat and Demmy

indulged in the elaboration of their plans for crowding enough diversion into Saturday night to compensate them for the frazzling effect that work and weather imposed upon body and soul.

"Fust off, Demmy, us 'sorbs 'nuff of dat sunrise gin to melt dis hard luck us is 'fested wid. Den us nutrifies wid sourdeen fishes an' some cheese."

"Sho' craves cheese, Wilecat, an' sour-deens."

"Den a ra'r wid de clickers in de back room of Willie Webster's barber shop an den mebbe us goes to de Festive Hall whah de whisp'rin' music itches inside yo' feet."

"Craves to heah me dat Honeymoonlight Blues."

"You an' me, Demmy! Craves to weave me dat Crow Flap thing!"

"Den some mo' gin!"

"An' back to Willie's place fo' one mo' livin' triumph oveh dem dead sevens!"

The miracle of time accomplished, Saturday dawned hot.

At evening, with a gratifying supper laid away, the Wildcat approached Captain Jack on the subject of drawing down enough of his retained earnings to afford the pleasure-lover a night's entertainment.

"Craves me two dollahs, Cap'n, suh. Kin you spare it?"

Captain Jack could spare it. "But don't you get mixed up any place. Stay clear of those Beale Street joints that are so popular with the police."

"Yass-suh. Sho' will. An', Cap'n, suh, kin Demmy git two dollahs fo' his pussonal evenin'?"

Demmy could get two dollars. Demmy had been a good boy.

"But if either one of you niggers gets jailed, you can trust me to pardon you free with a shotgun after you get loose. Monday you better paint that summer kitchen."

"Cap'n, yass-suh! Us depends on you heavy case us 'cumulates enny trouble wid de po-lice. Sho' do!"

Trailed by Demmy, the Wildcat retreated to his own corner of Captain Jack's woodshed where he adorned himself with an accumulation of raiment appropriate to the impending festivities, while from his own supply of clothes Demmy did the best he could to reflect the splendors of a hand-painted explosion in a paint shop.

A final twisting of necktie knots, one last swipe at glistening shoes with an old strip of velvet, two hearty splashes of musk, and the cares of yesterday were buried deep under an avalanche of anticipation.

"Hole de deal a minnit, Demmy, till I gits dat mascot goat."

The Wildcat walked out of the woodshed and prowled over to a corner of Captain Jack's back yard where Lily was grazing herself fat at the expense of a few square feet of thick green grass.

"Come 'long heah, goat! Me an' Demmy's gwine on a rampage."

"Blaa-a!" Lily's protest at being torn away from her banquet fell sharply on the Wildcat's ears.

"Come 'long widout no blattin' befo' I knocks you six blocks f'm breakfus'."

He looked down at Lily. On the mascot's moist lower jaw, adhering in a fringe of tender blades of grass, he saw a four-leaf clover!

The Wildcat's eyes widened when he saw this emblem of disaster and they deepened with crowding memories of what had followed upon the appearance of a similar talisman. "Lawd Gawd, Lady Luck! How come dat fo'-leaf debbil on my trail?"

His mind quickened with visions of new calamities that could develop from Old Man Trouble's attack.

Demmy noted his associate's mood of terror and was quick to inquire its cause. "How come you so wild-lookin'? See some black angel flyin' low?"

"Seed sumpin', Demmy! Dat I did! Warn't flyin'. Fo'-leaf cloveh stickin' to Lily's jaw! Ol' Man Trouble is on de trail! Come 'long! Us prowls out of dis Memphis town to whah at Lady Luck is waitin'. Come a-runnin'!

"When Ol' Man Trouble ketches up
To where I used to stand,
He finds my footprints leadin' to
De elsewhere Promised Land."